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WRECKS IN THE SEA OF LIFE.

BY

ALEXANDER BEGG.

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WRECKS IN THE SEA OF LIFE.

A NOVEL.

BY

ALEXANDER BEGG.

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WRECKS IN THE SEA OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

"DEAD! dead! dead! Oh! Elsie, my mother is dead, and there is no one to love or care for me now," cried Minna Grey, as she flung her arms round her nurse's neck and sobbed on her breast.

"Now, Minna, don't speak like that, dearie. No one can love like a mother, sure enough; but isn't your old nurse here to love and care for you, which she will do as long as there's a breath in her body; and then you've got your father. Your mother, poor dear, has gone where she'll have rest. She's happy now, sure,"—which she hasn't been for many a day, thought the old woman.

"Do you think mother is happy now?" asked the young girl, looking up through her tears into the face of old Elsie; "do you think she can be happy when I'm not with her? She always used to say I was her only comfort, and I'm not with her now. How can she be happy, Elsie? Oh! why didn't I die with her?"

"Well! dearie, I am sure your mother is happy, and though you can't see her, she is looking down on you all the time, and watching over you all the same as if she was here. She's having rest now, dearie, and that is happiness to her. Now, dry your eyes, for it's only paining your mother you are, by going on like this."

Minna looked at her nurse for some moments without speaking, as if she did not quite understand what the faithful old woman had been saying, but she ceased sobbing, and then startled her nurse by suddenly asking, "What did you say about father, Elsie?"

"Why! child, I said you had a father left to you. Isn't that something to be thankful for?"

"Father doesn't care for me, Elsie, and I don't think he cared very much for mother either.

"Minna Grey," said Elsie, "it is downright wicked for you to speak like that. It is dreadful."

"Wicked or dreadful! I don't care which: it is the truth; and what is more, Elsie, I do not think I like this father of mine very much. Now, don't look shocked. I'm not going to tell lies to you, Elsie, and say I love him when I don't. Does he come and kiss me as I see other fathers do their little girls? You know, Elsie, very well, I hardly ever see him. I might as well have no father at all."

"Child," said the nurse, "he has his business to attend to, and he hasn't much time to spare, but that oughtn't to make you say you don't like him."

"I only said I thought I did not like him, but I don't love him."

"Oh! child, don't say that. He's all you have now."

"I've got you, you dear old nurse," cried the impetuous girl, as she threw her arms round her nurse's neck and kissed her; but I won't say such things any more to please you, and for dear, dear dead mother's sake I'll try to love him. There now," and hugging Elsie once more, the strange child ran to her room, where she threw herself on her bed and sobbed herself to sleep, to dream that she was once more resting in the

arms of that fond mother whom she loved so dearly, and who only the day previous had been laid in her last resting-place.

Richard Grey, the father of Minna, was a cold, selfish, and unscrupulous man of the world. He was a confirmed gambler, but his great wealth secured for him a position in society which otherwise he would not have enjoyed. His cool head and practised hand prevented him from becoming a victim of the sharpers with whom he necessarily associated at the gaming-table; indeed he was generally suspected of being not over fair in his own play, and for that reason he lost the confidence of men who otherwise might have winked at his gaming proclivities.

Richard Grey was, in fact, one who, although he indulged his appetite for pleasure to the full, always took care to look after number one. He had been left a large fortune at the death of his father, and Minna's mother, whose parents were wealthy, had brought him a large dowry. He was a very handsome man, and, when he liked, had a most fascinating manner; but he was one of those snakes in society who only employ the good gifts given them for their own evil purposes, and so Richard Grey fascinated his young wife and won her love only to throw her aside after marriage, as a worthless toy of which he had become tired.

Minna Rayburn, for such was the name of Mrs. Grey before marriage, was of a loving, trusting nature. She dearly loved her husband when she married him, and thought him everything that was good and noble. He had cleverly concealed both from her and her parents the evil habits he indulged in; but it was only a short time after the honeymoon that he began to neg-

lect her, and then she discovered, when too late, that she had thrown away her heart, her happiness, on a man who cared for nobody but himself; who was a cold, calculating gambler, and who had not one single feature in his character to brighten in the smallest degree her doomed life.

Richard Grey was never guilty of actual cruelty towards his wife, but he systematically neglected her; and she, not being one of the butterflies of society, to take refuge in its gayeties, shrank more and more within herself and drooped day by day in her loneliness. Women of a quiet and retiring nature are frequently brave, and she was brave in the true sense of the word; as a girl she was gentle and lovable; as a wife, she was devoted and true. Neglect might kill her, but it never could make her forget her duty to her husband, or turn her from the path of honor. She made up her mind that her life was not to be a joyous one, and she resolved to bear her burden patiently. When her child was born, she felt that the Almighty had given her something to live for. The love which her husband had spurned she gave to her babe, and as the little Minna grew up she became her mother's sole companion. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Minna mourned deeply for her dead mother. It seemed, indeed, to the young girl as if she ought to have died and gone with her whom she had never been separated from, and whom she loved so dearly. Minna Grey, while possessed of her mother's loving character, was not of the same quiet and retiring nature. She was a most impulsive child, but, under the fond guidance of a good mother, she began life under the most favorable conditions. Observant for one of her years, she did not fail to notice the neglect suffered

by her mother; and while she, in her childish way, sympathized with the parent she loved so well, she could not restrain a feeling of something akin to dislike towards her cruel father.

Elsie, the nurse, had been a domestic in the Rayburn family for years,—had in fact grown up from a young girl in their employment. She was very fond of her young mistress and was easily induced to accompany her to her new home when she became Mrs. Richard Grey. When Minna was born, Mrs. Grey at once installed Elsie as nurse, knowing her fidelity and kindness of disposition. Elsie became like a second mother to Minna, and when Mrs. Grey was on her death-bed she charged the faithful servant to remain in the house to watch over and guard her child. Elsie had given a sacred promise to Mrs. Grey, that she would never desert Minna while she had health and strength ; and she kept her word. Mrs. Grey knew from her own sad experience that Richard Grey would utterly neglect his daughter, as he had in the past neglected her, his wife. She felt that Minna required some kind hand to smooth the path of her young life, and the thought that Elsie remained and had promised to watch over her child, was the one bright ray of happiness to the dying woman in her last moments.

Minna herself was in some respects a wayward child, full of impulse, as apt to do wrong as to do right just as the spirit of the moment moved her; but she was of an affectionate and loving disposition, and easily led by kindness. Sensitive to the slightest degree, she was ever ready to resent a supposed slight, and just as ready to forgive a real injury.

She was passionately fond of her mother and mourned

her loss deeply, but her father had always evinced so little interest in her, that Minna really regarded him with very little affection. She told the exact truth when she said to Elsie that she did not love him, and probably this feeling was as much caused by his neglect towards her mother as his indifference to herself. At the time we introduce Minna she was only fifteen years of age ; her form was therefore not developed and her character not fully formed, but she had every prospect of becoming a beautiful woman, and it will be seen how circumstances in after years moulded her with a physical as well as a mental beauty.

After his wife's death, Richard Grey took no further notice of his child than to give Elsie carte-blanche to procure everything that was necessary for her comfort or pleasure. As for himself, he devoted his time more and more to the pleasures he was so fond of. He rarely visited his house except to rest from his debaucheries, and, therefore, Minna saw very little of him. She was, however, accustomed to this neglect, and it did not trouble her so long as she had Elsie, and thus the love of the young girl for her nurse increased day by day.

As we have already stated, Mr. Grey was very wealthy, and, contrary to the general rule with gamblers, he was very careful of his money. He always played to win in a literal sense of the word, and was most unscrupulous as to the means he sometimes employed. He was liberal, however, towards his daughter, in furnishing her with everything which wealth could procure for her enjoyment, and it required all Elsie's good common sense and sound judgment to keep Minna within proper bound, and prevent her from cultivating those

expensive tastes so likely to result from her father's foolish indulgence. It will therefore be seen that Elsie had no easy task to perform after the death of Mrs. Grey, but she succeeded in retaining Minna's love while at the same time she curbed her in the foolish extravagance into which her father's folly was apt to drive her. With all Richard Grey's liberality and indulgence towards his child, he never gained one step in her love or affection, but this did not give him a moment's thought; and as for Minna, so long as she had Elsie with her, she was content. The old nurse at last realized how hopeless a task it would ever be to attempt to draw two such natures together when their dispositions and their feelings were so widely apart.

CHAPTER II.

For two years Elsie faithfully kept her promise to Mrs. Grey, and no child was ever more carefully guarded than was Minna by her old nurse. Richard Grey was quite willing to have the charge of his daughter taken off his hands, and so little interest did he feel in his household that he left the whole care of his domestic affairs in the hands of Elsie. The servants took their orders from her, and although she always made it understood that she was merely a housekeeper acting under orders from her young mistress, yet it was perfectly well known to all connected with the Grey mansion, that the old nurse was the chief controlling power, and that the master himself never sought to interfere with her plans or orders. Elsie, however, was not arbitrary; she merely sought to shoulder cares which she thought too heavy for Minna at her age. At the same time she endeavored to instruct the young girl so as to prepare her when the time came for her to take charge of her father's house. Minna led a quiet, happy life while Elsie lived; and though sometimes her wayward nature would assert itself, and make her inclined to rebel when Elsie sought to check some foolish whim caused by her father's unwise and thoughtless indulgence, on the whole the young girl was content to give way to the good judgment of her old nurse, and abide by her sound motherly

advice. In this way Elsie exerted a good influence over her young charge, and if she had been spared to live a few years longer, Minna might have escaped the trials and troubles of her after-life, and this story never been written. It was destined, however, that Elsie should be taken away before her task was completed, and two years after the loss of her mother, Minna sat by the death-bed of her nurse.

The young girl could hardly realize that she was about to lose the only friend she had in the world; for strange as it may appear, Minna had made few intimate acquaintances amongst her own sex. Her position as the daughter of the wealthy Richard Grey caused her to be sought after by many, but she seemed to have a distaste for society, and could not be induced to take part in any of its gayeties.

This was partly due to the influence of Elsie, who sought to keep her young charge away from the frivolities of fashionable life as long as possible, until such time, at least, as Minna's character would be sufficiently formed to enable her to avoid the snares sure to be set for a motherless girl who had only an unscrupulous father to watch over her.

Elsie knew well that the fact of Minna being an heiress to great wealth would make her an object of attention amongst the sterner sex, and she dreaded lest her affections should be gained by some unworthy suitor. She knew that Richard Grey would not be over-fastidious as to the character of the man who sought his daughter's hand in marriage, and, therefore, she wished Minna to be in a position to judge for herself. She hoped by constant warnings and advice to put the young girl on her guard; and she would have succeeded had

she lived a few years longer. The quiet life led by Mrs. Grey, during which Minna was her constant companion, and the good principles instilled into the young girl's mind at that period, assisted Elsie in carrying out her plan, as Minna had been taught to love the retirement of home rather than the gayety of society. But Elsie's death-bed was destined to be the broken link between the good and the evil in the life of Minna Grey.

It seemed almost as if she felt Elsie's death would leave her at the mercy of the cruel world, the way she clung to her faithful old servant and besought her not to die.

"Oh! Elsie, my second mother—my poor dear old nurse, don't say you are going away from me. What will I do when I am all alone? Don't think me selfish, Elsie, but I have no friend but you, and I have given you so much trouble sometimes; but only stay with me, dear Elsie, and I will be so thoughtful, so good to you."

"You've always been good to me, dearie," whispered the dying woman; "but I cannot stay, the Almighty has called me, dearie."

"Don't say that, nurse. I have not been so wicked that God should take the only friend I have from me; we'll have other doctors in. You won't die, Elsie; they don't know what is the matter with you. I ought to have thought of this before, but we'll have other doctors in to-day. They must cure you, Elsie."

"It is no use, dearie; doctors can do no good sure. My time has come, Minna dear. Now put your head down here near my pillow where I can stroke your hair, for I want to speak to you, dearie."

Minna knelt by the bedside of her nurse, and bowing her fair head, sobbed as if her heart would break.

Elsie did not speak for some time, but gently pressed the young girl's forehead with her trembling hands.

At last, when Minna seemed more composed, Elsie said in a low whisper, "Minna, dearie, I may live a day, I may be spared to you for a week, but I know I haven't long to live, and I want to speak to you about the time when I won't be with you to take care of you."

Minna did not speak. She hardly moved, only a slight shudder now and then indicated her deep emotion as she knelt quietly by the bedside.

"You know, dearie," the nurse continued, "when your mother was taken away she left you in my charge. She thought no one would mind you like old Elsie, who loves you so much—so much, my dearie, that it is the only thing that makes me wish not to die,—but God's will be done."

"Oh! Elsie," cried the young girl, looking up through her tears. "He wont take you from me. He is too good; you will get well."

"Dearie, His will is always for the best, though we don't sometimes see it. I am going away sure, and I want you to listen to me, Minna—while I have the power to speak—listen, dearie, and never forget what I'm going to say."

The old nurse paused for a moment. Her strength was almost exhausted by the effort she was making, and Minna, observing her weakness, rose and gave her a cordial, which revived her.

Elsie then continued, as Minna once more laid her head on the bed by her side. "You are young, dearie, and have a long life before you, with God's will—but you must be careful of yourself; your father has his own business to look after, and he's not accustomed

to be much with you. I want you, dearie, whenever you are in trouble, or when you don't know what to do for the best, to go to Him above, who will always set you right when you ask Him. You are a bonny lass, and there are plenty who will seek you for a wife; don't be in a hurry, dearie, in making a choice; see that he's a God-fearing man who seeks to be your husband; be sure of that, Minna. Don't take a handsome face unless there's a good heart with it. You'll have to be very careful, dearie, because—because—well now that I am going from you, I must tell the truth though I don't like saying aught against your father; but, dearie, be watchful of the men he will bring around this house when I'm gone; don't let your young heart go out to any one of them. There, Minna, I've told you my fears and leave you my warning. Think of your poor mother who's dead and gone. I want you to be a happy woman, Minna, and you won't forget your old nurse, dearie, will you?"

"Elsie! Elsie! my dear old Elsie, don't break my heart altogether," sobbed the young girl.

The old nurse soothed her young mistress with her feeble but fond caresses, and then she said, "When I am gone, Minna, the care of the house will fall on you. I have tried to teach you all I know, but now you will have to depend on yourself. I want you, dearie, to try and keep everything nice and comfortable. Maybe, when your father sees you flitting about and keeping things in order, he'll stay more at home. He'll notice more when you are doing things, and sure, perhaps I haven't done right to have taken so much on myself, but I did it for the best—to save you, dearie, when you were so young. Your father will be proud of you, Minna, for you're a bonny lass. Try to get an influence over him and use

it well; keep him more at home, it'll be for his good, dearie."

"Oh! Elsie, you know father does not care for me, —he never will,—but I'll try and be a good daughter to him for poor mother's sake and for yours."

The old nurse now seemed utterly exhausted from the exertion she had made, but her mind was apparently relieved of load; and as she sank back on her pillows there was a look of contentment on her face, and the gentle attention of Minna made her last moments full of peace.

Minna was as good as her word, for she insisted upon other medical advice being called in, but it was of no avail, for a couple of days after the interview which we have related between the old nurse and her young mistress, Elsie passed away quietly to her last home.

There is no doubt the old woman, since Mrs. Grey's death, had acted as a guardian angel over Minna. She had been, in fact, a barrier in one sense of the word, between Richard Grey and his daughter,—not in the sense of separating parent and child, but rather of protecting the latter from the evil influence of the former. She saw that Richard Grey was becoming proud of his daughter's beauty, and knowing his designing nature, she feared lest he might use his influence as a father to induce Minna to form a marriage to serve his own evil ends, without any consideration for her happiness. Elsie had been a close observer, and she had foreseen this danger which lay in the path of her young charge; and when, on her death-bed, she tendered her loving advice, she hoped that it would prove to be of lasting effect.

In her own quiet way she had kept Richard Grey in

check, and had prevented him from bringing his dissolute companions to his own house; and this she had managed by keeping Minna from joining her father when he was accompanied by any gentleman. Elsie knew that Richard Grey, during his wife's life, had been a wealthy man, but she was shrewd enough to suspect that there was a possibility of his gambling excesses ruining him, and she knew not how far he might go to force his daughter into a marriage for the purpose of redeeming his losses.

Elsie had not lived in Richard Grey's house for seventeen years without being able to form a correct opinion of his character, and she knew he was base enough to sacrifice his own daughter, if necessary, to benefit himself.

Minna was utterly disconsolate after the death of Elsie, and for a long time took little interest in anything going on about the house.

She kept very much to herself, and saw very little of her father; but the time came when she remembered her promise to Elsie, and then she began to move about and direct the household affairs.

One night she resolved to remain up and have an interview with her father when he came in. As usual, it was long past midnight when he made his appearance. Hearing his footsteps in the hall, she went to him, and rather surprised him by coming towards him and saying, "Father, I would like to speak to you before you go to bed, if you are not too tired."

"I am rather worn out, Minna, but you and I have so few conversations together, that I cannot refuse you. I will just go up to my room for a moment, and will meet you in the library." Saying which, Richard Grey as-

cended the staircase. Minna repaired to the library and awaited her father's coming. It was to be her first effort to try and induce him to remain more at home, and she trembled at the task before her. She feared her father, and dreaded his cold, indifferent manner.

In a few minutes Richard Grey entered the room, and taking a chair, drew it near to his daughter and sat down.

"Now, Minna," he said abruptly, "here I am. What have you to say: do you want money; if so, how much, or is it anything you wish me to get? You know I never deny you. "Father," replied Minna, "you have always been very kind to me so far as furnishing me with everything I want, but it is not money, nor do I wish for anything for myself at present, it is something else I desire to speak to you about."

"Then what is it," interrupted Mr. Grey. "You haven't fallen in love, I hope," he added, with something like a frown.

"No! no!" said Minna, "only listen to me. When Elsie was alive, father, you know she attended to everything for me, and I think I must have been very thoughtless, very selfish, for I never tried to do anything for you to make you happy. We hardly saw each other, father, and now it has all come back to me like a flash. I haven't been a good daughter to you. Will you let me try to be one."

"Hum! well, Minna, you are very kind, although, it is true, your offer comes rather late in the day," replied Mr. Grey; "but I don't blame you as you seem to blame yourself. I don't think the fault, if any, is altogether yours. I never cared very much for what is called home comforts; in fact, I can get on very well without them;

they are apt to bore me sometimes, and I think if we have not seen very much of each other it has been my fault instead of yours. Elsie managed so well that I had no fears about you; but, of course, now that she is dead, it makes a difference. Let me hear what your ideas are."

"My plan is, father, for you to come home more regularly and stay with me. I will make everything so comfortable for you. I will indeed try very hard."

"My dear girl, I would die in a week under such an order of things. It can't be done; it is not my nature, and nature's nature; I am very much in favor of following my natural inclinations; but don't look so glum, I'll compromise the matter with you."

Minna brightened. "You see," continued Mr. Grey, "you have reached an age when you are expected to go into society—to see more of the world. It won't do for a girl in your position to mope all your life; and I am very glad of an opportunity to speak to you on this subject. Your mother never was fond of society, but if she had lived till now, she would have been of the same mind as I am with regard to you. You must go out, and I must go with you, although I hate balls and parties."

"Oh! father," said Minna, "this is not what I meant. I am happy as I am."

"I am aware of that, thanks to your mother's and Elsie's teachings, but you have a duty to perform not only to yourself but also to me; and now I will tell you how I propose to compromise with you. We will commence by having a regular routine of breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and I will endeavor to be always present. I will also spend an occasional evening at home on the understanding that you will consent to entertain, and be entertained by, my friends, or those in our circle."

"Why is this necessary?" asked Minna.

"Because," replied Mr. Grey, "to speak plainly, I have certain plans in view for you. In the first place, you cannot remain unmarried much longer. You must have a protector, for who knows how long I may be spared to you! It is my duty to see that you are properly married, and I certainly will never consent to your marrying beneath you. It is necessary, therefore, that you should go into society, and you cannot do so better than under my guidance. We must entertain, if we accept entertainments at the hands of others, and, therefore, I propose that we do what I consider to be our duty to society, and open our doors to our friends. They have been closed long enough, God knows."

"This is so unexpected, father, and is so different from what I wished for; will you give me a little time to think over it? I will try to do as you wish, only give me time."

"Certainly, Minna, certainly," said Mr. Grey; "and to show you that I mean to keep my part of the bargain, we will commence to-morrow morning with breakfast at eight o'clock, lunch at one, and dinner at six in the evening. I will be here to join you, and you may expect to see more of me than you have hitherto done; but now it is very late, you must be tired."

Minna rose and bade her father good-night, leaving him in the library. She felt that her effort had not been altogether unsuccessful, but she was bewildered by her father's sudden proposition; she could hardly realize what was in store for her. She deeply regretted, however, the prospect of her quiet mode of life being broken into, and shrank from entering the scenes of gayety as her father wished her to do.

When his daughter had gone, Richard Grey sat ruminating over his schemes. Ah! he thought, this is a lucky hit. She played right into my hands. I expected more resistance, but now I have the advantage, and will follow it up. She will make a decided sensation when I bring her out, and then—well, we will see; saying which he rose and went to his room.

CHAPTER III.

THE Grey mansion was situated in St. Louis, and was one of the handsomest residences in that city. It was located at a point which commanded a fine view of the broad Mississippi as it flowed onward, its placid bosom dotted here and there with river craft and palatial steamers. The murky flow of the Missouri could be observed gradually mixing with the clear waters of the Mississippi, as, combining, they commenced their journey of 1350 miles to the sea. And along the levee the forest of chimneys belonging to the steamers, extending for miles in front of the city, gave some idea of the immense river trade carried on in St. Louis, while the shouts of the darkies as they rolled the freight over the gangways, and the noise of heavily laden mule trains as they rumbled over the iron-coated streets and stone pavement of the levee, gave an air of bustle and excitement to the scene. The house was a solid and substantial looking building possessing a good deal of architectural beauty, and was erected by Mr. Grey's father, who left it to his son Richard as a portion of his inheritance. The stables and out-houses were very ornamental in appearance, and everything about the place denoted not only taste, but great wealth. The grounds surrounding the house were not large, but beautifully laid off, and although only a small lawn intervened between the front of the

building and the street, there was a fine garden behind which contained many beautiful trees, and resembled more a vineyard of the south of France than anything else, so vine-clad was it, and teaming with the luscious Catawba and other grapes. A large and well-stocked conservatory adjoined, in which Minna loved to spend hours attending to her favorite plants and flowers. The furnishings were in keeping with the house, and were altogether of the handsomest description. It was a home such as Minna would have found delightful had she been blessed with a kind, loving and considerate father, instead of the cold and selfish being Richard Grey proved himself to be.

Minna Grey's aversion to entering society arose from the teachings of her mother, and the subsequent training of Elsie, who had, as we have shown, an object in keeping her charge in retirement. It is doubtful whether Elsie was quite wise in preventing Minna from seeing more of the world, knowing as she did that, sooner or later, Mr. Grey would insist upon his daughter taking part in the gayeties of the city. Minna had been taught to look on the latter as unbecoming a good woman and dangerous to a young girl, and hence the very thought of her father's recent proposition was exceedingly distasteful to her. She was by no means prudish, but she was utterly ignorant of the ways of the world, and therefore could only judge of life according to her teachings. She had no experience to guide her. She reasoned, however, that by obeying her father's wishes she might be brought more in contact with him, and could therefore exert more influence over him for his good, and consequently, after a few days, she intimated to him her willingness to abide by his wishes.

The servants, accustomed to wait on the master as his irregular habits might happen to dictate, were astonished when the new order of affairs became inaugurated. They wondered at the change, and Minna for a time felt a pride in presiding over the household when her father, for almost the first time in his life, participated in the forms of a well-regulated home.

He was seldom absent from the breakfast or dinner table, and frequently spent the evenings with his daughter. It seemed as if a wonderful change had come over him.

He had been in the habit of having his meals served in the library at unseasonable hours, whenever his roving propensities permitted him to dine in his own house; but now all that was dispensed with, and with singular regularity for a man of his habits, he chose of his own will to conform to the ordinary usages of domestic life.

One morning at breakfast, not long after the understanding arrived at between Richard Grey and his daughter, he said to her, "Minna, a lady, Mrs. Rolph, will call on you to-day, and I wish you to become intimate with her. She is one of the leading ladies in our set, and I have chosen her to assist you in a very important matter which I am contemplating. She is a fine woman, and one in whom I have great confidence. She very kindly consented to assist you in making your first appearance."

"Why, father, you would imagine it was a dreadful ordeal I had to go through, this first appearance. Am I so very awkward that I require some one to school me how to act?"

"Far from it, Minna," said Mr. Grey, smiling. "You are by no means awkward; in fact, I am quite sure you

will create a great sensation, but you require at your age and circumstances a chaperone, and of course the higher the standing of the lady who is to act as such the better for you."

"Oh ! I see," said Minna, "a sort of walking letter of introduction. Is Mrs. Rolph pretty, or is she an ugly, wrinkled old lady ?"

Mr. Grey actually laughed aloud. "She is one of the most beautiful women in St. Louis," he said, "and I am sure you will like her."

Minna at once made up her mind to hate her, but she merely replied—"Very well, father, I will be happy to see Mrs. Rolph ; but what is it you are contemplating ?"

"I intend giving a grand ball," said Mr. Grey, "and as you are unused to such affairs, Mrs. Rolph will be of great assistance. She knows how to make out the list of invitations, and will in fact superintend the whole matter—you are decidedly in luck to have her."

Minna was so unprepared for this sudden information of her father's intentions, that she could only exclaim—"Father, I will never be able to go through with it: it is too much to expect from me."

"Nonsense, child, with Mrs. Rolph by your side ; you will manage famously. Do you suppose I would risk failure in such an important matter ?"

Minna began to look upon the advent of her chaperone with more favor than she had done when she realized what was in contemplation for her. She had supposed that the most she would be expected to do was to accompany her father to some public or private entertainment, but here she was destined to become at once the centre of attraction in her debut before the

world of fashion. She was fairly staggered at the prospect, and leaving the table abruptly, she fled to her room to give vent to her vexation in tears.

"Elsie! Elsie! my dear old nurse, why are you not with me? I have no one to tell my troubles to now. Why did you leave me? What will become of me? It is cruel, cruel." It was the final parting from her quiet, happy life, this outburst of the young girl; but when she had time to reflect, she made up her mind to the inevitable change which was before her, and resolved to face it bravely. She dreaded the ordeal, nevertheless.

In the afternoon Mrs. Rolph called. Minna thought her the most beautiful woman she had ever seen, and she was so very pleasing, so very kind in her manner, that the young girl could hardly dislike her. Yet there was something about her which Minna could not understand,—a something so different from anything she had ever been accustomed to, that she could not withhold a feeling of distrust towards her fair visitor.

Mrs. Rolph was a thorough woman of the world, not altogether free from certain peccadilloes in her private life which, if known, would have been sufficient to injure her position in society, but which she had kept so cleverly concealed, that not the slightest breath of scandal had ever been raised against her.

Mr. Grey was one of her most intimate friends, and no one knew her feelings better than he; yet he was so unscrupulous as to place his only daughter under her guidance. Mrs. Rolph was the first to introduce the subject of the ball, and then she and Minna discussed the whole matter to its minutest details. The fashionable woman depicted the coming event in such glowing terms to her young and inexperienced listener, that she finally

succeeded in creating some degree of enthusiasm in Minna's mind. So conversant did Mrs. Rolph appear with all that was necessary to be done, that Minna Grey actually began to feel thankful to her father for his thoughtfulness in securing the services of such a highly gifted chaperone, and when her visitor left, she could not help acknowledging that she had spent a couple of very pleasant hours in her company.

Mrs. Rolph at once acquainted Mr. Grey with the result of her visit, and he was very much pleased at her apparent success.

The evening of the great event found everything in order to ensure a complete success. Under the skilful management of Mrs. Rolph, a long list of carefully selected invitations had been issued. The most elaborate preparations had been made throughout the house for the reception and entertainment of the guests, and Minna, through her father's liberality and at his desire, had procured a beautiful and most becoming dress for the occasion. The young girl was in a whirl of excitement, but in the midst of it she was not happy;—the quiet, patient face of her dead mother would frequently pass across her memory, and the good and gentle Elsie would seemingly appear to her, as if to warn her against the step she was about to take. One thought only seemed to give her strength to go through what she really deemed a trial, and that was the delusive hope of winning over her father from his roving habits. She imagined that by giving way to his wishes she would bring him closer to her, but she little dreamed how wily a mortal she had to deal with in her dissolute parent. She did make an effort at rebellion when Mr. Grey insisted upon her wearing her mother's jewels at the ball.

It seemed a sacrilege in her eyes to wear them on such an occasion, but her father overruled her objections in this as he had done in other matters.

On the evening of the ball the house was one blaze of light, and soon the carriages began to arrive and deposit their gay occupants at the hall door. Mrs. Rolph had arrived early, and remained by the side of Minna in the drawing-room to assist her in receiving the guests; and Mr. Grey, who was a very handsome man, never appeared handsomer nor in gayer spirits than he did that evening. He had reason to feel proud of his daughter; for Minna, with an easy grace hardly to be expected from one with so little experience, acted the hostess to perfection; her fair young face, sparkling with animation from the excitement, looked perfectly lovely, and her form, just budding into womanhood, was sufficiently developed to lend a charm to her every movement. Mrs. Rolph felt herself eclipsed beside the young girl, and was therefore somewhat chagrined at the part she was playing. The woman of fashion, however, knew better than to allow her feelings to be observed, and Minna could not have wished for a better chaperone, nor for a more attentive companion.

There were very few of the invited guests who did not put in an appearance, for the ball at Mr. Grey's had been the principal theme of fashionable conversation in St. Louis during the week. Minna certainly fulfilled her father's expectations, for she created a decided sensation, and Mr. Grey was in ecstasies over the success of his plans.

It is needless to recount how the ball passed off—how Minna was besieged with suitors for her hand in the mazy dance,—how everyone appeared to enjoy them-

selves thoroughly, and how many of them afterwards went home to criticise and pull to pieces the arrangements so carefully made by the Greys for their enjoyment. Mrs. Rolph gave her opinion in the following few words to Mr. Grey, as he handed her to her carriage. "You have made the hit of the season, Mr. Grey. I congratulate you." "Thanks!" he replied, "but I owe it to you, and he softly pressed the hand of the captivating widow as she allowed it to rest for a moment in his.

When the last of the guests had taken their departure, and Minna was alone with her father, he said,—

"Minna, had your mother taken the same trouble, during her life, to please me as you have done to-night, there never would have been unhappiness between us, but she never tried to understand me." Minna looked at her father, aghast at his words. Her pure mother in heaven spoken of in this way and at such a time—she whose memory she revered for her noble, good and patient qualities, to be reviled in this way, and by him whom she called father, but who had never earned her respect, far less her love. She could hardly credit her senses; she was but too well aware of the neglect suffered by her mother, and how patiently that mother had borne it.

"You have done admirably," continued Mr. Grey. "I told you you would create a sensation."

Suddenly the hopelessness of the task she had undertaken flashed across Minna's mind. How could she ever expect to learn filial reverence for the man who could thus stand coolly before her and insult the memory of her mother? For a moment she remained without speaking, looking at her father with a pale face, her outraged feelings having driven every particle of color

from her cheeks. Then she burst forth with all the impulsiveness of her nature. "If I have created a sensation, I am sorry for it. I wish I had not been a party to this night's work. I hate myself for it. I will always hate the thought of to-night, and I almost hate you for speaking of my dead mother as you have done!"

Mr. Grey looked surprised at this unexpected outburst, but he had no opportunity to reply, for Minna had disappeared ere he could recover from his astonishment.

The next moment he was as cool as ever. "Hum!" he thought, "this girl of mine is certainly not endowed with meekness—she has just a little dash of the devil, which I rather like. I made a mistake, however, for I forgot for the moment how fond she was of her mother, which is unpardonable in me; but, if I'm not mistaken, she'll come to her senses very soon."

"I must play my hand better in future, and she has given me a cue to aid me." Mr. Grey then retired to his room pleased on the whole with the success of his plans, and not at all disturbed by the parting words of his daughter.

Minna, on the other hand, was thoroughly miserable. For a long time she could not sleep, and the feeling uppermost in her mind was resentment against her father, and regret at having participated so heartily in the evening's festivities.

Over and over again she upbraided herself, until at last sleep overpowered her.

The next morning when the events of the previous evening presented themselves, and she was in a state of mind to view them more calmly, she began to think that she had acted too hastily, and not as became a daughter towards her father.

She was not one whit less loyal in her sentiments towards her mother. She was shocked at the remembrance of her father's words, but the desire to win him was reawakened in her, and she began to fear that her hasty words had offended him beyond redemption.

All that day Mr. Grey studiously avoided meeting his daughter, and when evening came without her having seen him, Minna felt very unhappy. The reaction from the excitement of the previous evening probably intensified this feeling, and finally, unable to bear it any longer, she resolved to write and ask her father's forgiveness. Acting at once on this idea, she sat down and penned the following note:

"My dear Father.

"I am very sorry indeed for the words I used to you last night. But you know how fond I was of poor mother, and I cannot bear to hear anything said against her. I ought not to have spoken to you as I did, and I hope you will forgive me; but please do not say anything to me ever about mother again. I have missed you all day; do not leave me alone any longer, come and forgive your daughter

"Minna."

She wrote and re-wrote this note several times ere she found it to please her. She signed herself loving daughter, and scored it out. She felt it would be a written lie—she could not even bring herself to use the word affectionate, and so she sent it as it appears above. She did not love her father—yet missed his presence. She was trying in her own way to do what she supposed to be a duty to her only parent, feeling at the same time that he was her only protector.

Her mind was divided between what she regarded

as her duty and her self-preservation, but there was little respect and no love towards her father to be found in her thoughts.

When she had written her note she called her father's favorite servant, a boy named Tim Hucklebury (of whom we will speak hereafter), and instructed him to see that his master received it either that night or early the next morning.

Tim promised to deliver the note.

CHAPTER IV.

THE greater portion of Mr. Grey's wealth was invested in stocks and other securities, in order to allow him to realize at short notice, if he wished to do so. Certain transactions in the New York stock market happened to require his presence in that city about this time, and without notifying his daughter of his departure, he left St. Louis the same evening on which Minna had written to him. He therefore did not receive her note as she had expected.

Tim at once reported to his mistress that his master had not been home, and that he did not know his whereabouts to deliver the letter.

Minna's uneasiness, therefore, increased and became insupportable, when her father did not make his appearance for several days.

We will now accompany Mr. Grey on his trip to New York.

Soon after he had entered and taken his berth in the Pullman car, he was joined by a gentleman, who seemed to be a very intimate friend.

"Hillo! Grey," said the newcomer, "where are you off to?"

"I am going as far as New York, and am very glad to see you're on the move as well as myself," replied Mr. Grey. "Take a seat, Selby, with me, if you're not better engaged."

"Very happy, old man, I'm all alone," was the reply, and the two men seated themselves for a chat; Mr. Grey telling the porter to leave making up his berth till the last.

"That was a splendid affair of yours last night, Grey," said Selby.

"It came off very well, certainly. I hope you enjoyed yourself; I was so much engaged looking after the people, that I saw very little of you," answered Mr. Grey, "and by the way, didn't Mrs. Rolph outshine herself?"

"The widow looked very charming indeed; she always does, but she was fairly thrown into the shade last evening; she was actually dowdy when compared to Miss Grey. By Jove! old man, how came you to keep such a treasure hid so long? Excuse me, Grey, but really all the fellows have gone crazy over the beauty of your daughter."

Mr. Grey smiled, not at all displeased at the vehemence of his companion. "She is young, Selby," he remarked, "only seventeen, and last evening was a severe trial for her. I don't know what we would have done without Mrs. Rolph."

"Gad! in my opinion the widow appeared to be something like a supernumerary; and, joking aside, Grey, I don't think it was quite the thing for you to place her there. Now don't be annoyed, old fellow, you and I know Mrs. Rolph very well; and come, own up you made a mistake. Your daughter is too good to be brought in such close contact with our charming widow."

"Nonsense, Selby; Mrs. Rolph is just as good as half the women you meet in society, and she knows how to take care of herself, which is more than some of them do."

"Well, I have nothing further to say, and it was a bit of presumption on my part to speak as I did; but, gad! Miss Grey looked too pure and innocent to be alongside of a woman like Mrs. Rolph. Let's change the subject, however; the widow's a sore point with you, I see."

Mr. Grey evidently did not relish Selby's remarks; but the latter, as if unconscious of having said anything very serious to annoy his companion, rattled away at once on another topic. "How did you come out with Langton?" he asked.

"He took a couple of thousand; but I am to have my revenge on my return," replied Mr. Grey.

"That Langton," remarked Selby, "is a lucky dog; I don't know what to make of him; he's cleaned me out pretty well. The truth is, Grey, I'm on my way to see the governor to recuperate a little. I'm out of funds—skinned completely."

"Langton is the only man," said Mr. Grey, with a touch of bitterness in his tone, "who ever bled me, as I must confess he has done, but I will get even with him if it costs me my last dollar."

"I'll back you for all I'm worth," said Selby, smiling.

"Thanks," said Mr. Grey; "but I do not speak of my losses to everyone as I have to you."

"You would be a confounded ass if you did; but you can trust me. Say, when do you meet Langton again? I'd like to be present."

"We have an appointment on Friday evening next week, at the ——— rooms. This will not give me much time in New York; but I will be on hand at any sacrifice."

"By Jove! I'll try to be back in time," said Selby;

and there the matter dropped, as the porter of the car came to prepare the berth for the night.

The two friends, therefore, separated until the following morning.

As our readers may have already surmised, George Selby was a fast young man—a gambler, like Mr. Grey; but, unlike him, a reckless and, therefore, unfortunate one. His parents were very wealthy, and he being an only son had been petted and spoiled from childhood. Already he had lost large sums of money at the gaming-table, which he had drawn from an over-indulgent father, who supplied the funds without inquiring how they were used. Selby always had some good excuse to give his father when asking for money, and the fond parent, who had implicit confidence in his son, never dreamed of questioning the truthfulness of his statements. Only a few weeks previous to the time we introduce him to our readers he had drawn very heavily on his father, and here he was on his way to New York utterly stripped of cash to interview "the governor" for more.

George Selby, although passionately fond of play, and addicted to very dissipated habits, was not at heart a bad man. He scorned a mean or unmanly act, and was generous to a fault. He accepted money from his father as a right, because he knew it would come to him sooner or later, on the death of his parents, and he hoodwinked the old gentleman with perfect *sangfroid*, and with no qualms of conscience, because he had been accustomed to do so from boyhood, and he had come to look upon it as the simplest method to gain his ends.

There was one peculiarity about George Selby altogether at variance with his general dissolute character. He was ambitious, and his ambition was to make a name

for himself in the literary world. He was gifted with talents of a high order, but, unfortunately, he had not yet learned how to employ them to advantage.

He could not bring himself to face the drudgery of a literary life; for while he was interested in one of the St. Louis daily papers, and frequently wrote leading articles for it, he never identified himself with the office, even though he had become known as a talented and powerful writer. The truth is, he loved his ease and pleasure more than his ambition; but for all that, he never divested himself of the idea that some day he would shine as an author. At odd times he became a hard reader, and the works he selected were always of a high standard. Had George Selby been the son of poor parents, obliged to earn his own livelihood, he would have risen rapidly to eminence; but as it was, he had never felt any care to provide for the morrow, and, consequently, through lack of application and the evil associations he formed, he frittered his time away.

He was a perfect simpleton in money matters, and being open-hearted and generous, his liberality was often taken advantage of by his associates.

Mr. Grey had become acquainted with Selby in a manner which bound the two men in close friendship ever afterwards. It happened that Selby, soon after his first arrival in St. Louis, visited one of the gambling houses and was induced to play with one of the worst blacklegs in the city. By an accident he discovered that he was being systematically cheated, and at once throwing down his cards accused his partner of foul play.

Quick as thought the scoundrel drew his revolver and aimed it at Selby's head; but Mr. Grey, who was standing near, threw up the hand which held the pistol,

and the next moment dealing the would-be murderer a blow, sent him crashing to the floor.

Mr. Grey then drew his revolver and stood by the side of Selby, and his well known coolness and nerve alone saved him and his companion from the vengeance of the blackleg's confederates, and kept them at bay.

Mr. Grey then linked his arm in Selby's and drew him from the room, and when they had gained the street he said, "You are a stranger evidently in the city and rather inexperienced. You have had a narrow escape."

"By Jove! yes, and I am indebted to you for my life. I believe if it hadn't been for you, I would be a dead man. May I have the pleasure of your name."

"Certainly ; I am Richard Grey, and you ?"

"George Selby, at your service from this time out."

Thus commenced an acquaintance which afterwards ripened into the closest friendship.

Mr. Grey soon ascertained that Selby was a man of wealth and that he was destined to inherit an immense fortune, and this in itself was sufficient to make him cultivate his new-found friend. It is needless to say that Richard Grey used Selby as a tool from the first time he met him. He won his money regularly, and made his calculations in the coolest manner possible to win every dollar of the young man's inheritance when the time came.

It was owing greatly to Mr. Grey that Selby became so infatuated with play, and yet the young man regarded him as his best and staunchest friend. How blind is friendship sometimes!

Selby had been one of the guests at Mr. Grey's ball, and had been captivated by the charms of the young hostess. Mr. Grey had kept his eye keenly on the

young man's movements through the entire evening although he professed to have seen very little of him. He had an object in view in thus interesting himself about Selby, but he carefully concealed that object within his own breast.

Selby himself was not communicative to the father in regard to his feelings towards Minna, and so the two were playing at cross-purposes without being aware of it.

When separating at the railway depot in New York, Selby merely remarked, "I hope, Grey, you'll allow me to call and become a visitor at your house, now that you have opened it to your friends."

"Will be happy to see you at any time. I am sure my daughter will always be glad to receive one of my best friends."

"Thanks! old fellow," said Selby, as they shook hands at parting.

CHAPTER V.

TIM HUCKLEBURY was the favorite attendant of Mr. Grey, and at the same time there was not a servant in the house more devoted to Minna. He took special care of her pony, and generally accompanied her as her groom when she went out riding, which she did very often. Tim was a strange looking creature outwardly, and his character was about as odd as his personal appearance. He was short and very thin, but wiry; he had a small head, turned-up nose, and bright sparkling eyes. His hair was dark brown, and always kept cut short, and his face was deeply pitted by small-pox. There was not a better nor a more fearless rider in St. Louis than Tim.

One day when out riding with Minna, he had allowed his horse to loiter far behind his mistress, when to his horror he saw her pony take fright and dash off in the direction of the river. In a moment Tim's horse felt the spurs deep into his flanks, and the next instant the startled animal bounded forward, his rider urging him at a furious pace with whip and spur. It was a race for life or death. Minna never lost her self-possession, although she had no control over her frightened pony. The thundering of Tim's horse after him only increased his fear, and he rushed on with renewed speed.

"Keep your seat, Miss, hold well on," shouted Tim, "I'll soon be up to you."

Minna heard his voice and took courage, but the next

instant the broad river presented itself to her view, and she saw at a glance that unless Tim could stop her pony ere she reached the bank, she would be lost.

As for Tim, he took in the situation at a glance and decided in a moment what he would do. He saw that he could not possibly reach Minna to stop her in time. So throwing his feet out of the stirrups, he shouted to Minna, "Let him go, don't throw yourself off, the bank is low, let him take the river, I'm right after you and can save you."

Minna heard, her heart gave a great throb as she saw her danger. She thought of her mother, of Elsie; it seemed as if her whole life passed in review before her in a moment's time.

She had faith in Tim, but could hardly realize how he would be able to save her. When she approached the bank, her pony bearing along at break-neck speed, she closed her eyes; the next moment there was a splash, and then she lost all consciousness.

Minna's pony had hardly reached the water ere there was a second splash, and Tim's horse could have been seen swimming towards the shore without a rider. But Tim himself, who was an excellent swimmer, had already reached Minna, and was bearing her inanimate form to the bank, which he soon reached, and laying his insensible burden on the grass bounded off to a house close by and in a few moments had brought assistance. In a short time Minna revived, and Tim having procured a carriage from a gentleman living near, drove her home at her urgent request, although the kind people who had been attending to her begged her to accept of their hospitality.

But Minna, although dripping wet, preferred driving

back at once, and so Tim, who blamed himself for the accident, did not hesitate a moment in obeying the wishes of his young mistress.

This incident served to make Tim more anxious than ever to serve Minna, and she feeling that she owed her life to him was ever grateful to him, and whenever she wanted anything done particularly she invariably went to Tim.

She knew the boy was always ready and pleased to do her biddings, but she did not understand how thoroughly devoted he was to her, and she little imagined the important part he was to play in her after-life.

As we have already mentioned, Tim was also the favorite servant in Mr. Grey's estimation. In fact the boy occupied more the position of a confidential valet than anything else to his master. He was aware of many secrets concerning Richard Grey which the latter did not wish known generally. Tim frequently accompanied his master to his favorite haunts, and therefore knew and was known by all the principal gamblers in St. Louis. But the lad was wise in keeping his own counsel, and he never betrayed his master in the slightest degree by word or deed. Tim was rather a favorite amongst the sporting fraternity. His quaint ways, indomitable cheek, and well known pluck raised him in their opinion.

When Minnas' anxiety in regard to her father's absence became known to Tim, he hunted the city in every place where he thought he might be able to find his master; but his search proved unsuccessful, which rather puzzled him, inasmuch as Mr. Grey seldom went away on any special errand without first acquainting Tim of his whereabouts.

This he did, lest he might be wanted for any particular purpose, in which case his servant could always find him.

But on this occasion he had gone off without letting Tim know where, and the boy at once concluded something extraordinary had happened.

During his search he had learned the particulars of his master's play with Langton, and supposed heavy losses, and knowing that his money was principally invested through a New York firm, he shrewdly guessed that Mr. Grey had gone to that city to replenish his purse. As we already know, he was correct in his surmise, and Tim feeling sure that he was right, haunted the railway depot at every incoming train, until at last he met his master.

Tim at once acquainted Minna of her father's arrival, and was once more entrusted with the note which this time he safely delivered.

Mr. Grey's face, on reading it, lighted up with pleasure.

"Ah!" he thought, "I felt sure she would come to her senses. I'll have no more trouble with her."

Richard Grey sent word by Tim that he would join his daughter at dinner that evening, a communication which greatly eased poor Minna's mind.

CHAPTER VI.

MINNA was really delighted when her father made his appearance at the dinner-table according to promise, but she felt almost happy when he signified his intention of spending the evening with her. The truth is, he was tired both in body and mind, and required rest. He fretted a good deal over his recent losses, more on account of his having met his equal in play for the first time, than the money he had lost. He was to meet Langton the following evening, and he wished to remain quiet, in order to nerve himself for the occasion. It was by no means out of consideration for Minna that he spent the evening at home, although he allowed her to imagine so.

Minna of course looked on it as a desire on her father's part to show a reconciliation, and when with crafty duplicity he referred to her mother in the kindest manner, as if to dispel any idea that he regarded her memory with aught but respect, the innocent and confiding girl blamed herself more and more for having been so hasty during their previous interview. Thus Mr. Grey succeeded in bending Minna unknown to herself to become a willing tool in his hands.

Minna Grey retired to rest that night with the consoling idea that she had succeeded in taking the first step towards reforming her father, while he felt that the

principal obstacle had been overcome towards obtaining an influence over his daughter for his own purpose. He felt that with care he could now mould her to his wishes.

The next evening Mr. Grey met Langton to have his revenge, and Selby, true to his word, had returned from New York in time to be present.

The two players were very much alike in personal appearance. They were both handsome men, with clear cut features—each had the cold glitter in the eye which denoted an utter absence of feeling towards his fellowmen. The small mouth, with thin colorless lips firmly closed, denoting decision and great nerve, was observable in both, and their cool, quiet manner, without the slightest appearance of excitement, whether losing or winning, pronounced them to be expert gamblers. They were opponents worthy of each other. They were equals as far as knowledge of play went, but on this occasion luck was against the one and in favor of the other with fearful odds.

Mr. Grey again lost heavily, his opponent sweeping everything before him. Selby, who sat near, was fascinated by the excitement of the scene before him. He looked into Mr. Grey's face, but could not detect the slightest appearance of annoyance or impatience in his features. He was as calm as if he was merely playing for amusement instead of for thousands—the only perceptible sign (slight in itself) was a quicker, almost nervous, motion of his long white hand with its taper fingers as he dealt the cards.

Langton played with equal composure. Although a heavy winner, he did not allow the slightest appearance of elation to be observed in his manner. He was a most

accomplished gambler; he was the only equal Mr. Grey had ever met in the course of his life.

The heavy play of the two men had attracted the attention of a number of the most noted gamblers in St. Louis, and quite a crowd of men stood and sat round the table.

All through the night, and well into the morning, the interest of the game never abated, and hardly a word was spoken in the room, so intense was the excitement felt by those present. The two players seemed the coolest men in the company.

At last Mr. Grey threw down the cards. "It is no use, Langton; I'd prefer taking this up some other time."

"All right, Grey; whenever you say the word I am ready."

The two men rose. Not another word was spoken between them concerning the game, but the bystanders stood whispering in groups over the result of the night's work. Grey, Langton and Selby had a bottle of champagne between them, and then the party separated; and as Grey went out, leaning rather heavily on his friend Selby, he said: "Langton plays a fair game, but the devil is on his side; I cannot understand him. I never met his equal. I have a queer feeling that that man will ruin me, Selby."

"Tut! tut! Grey, you are overwrought; it has been an awful night, by Jove, though you are the coolest pair I ever heard of or saw."

"Cool!" exclaimed Mr. Grey; "yes! Do you know, Selby, if I'd seen the slightest sign of foul play I would have shot him in his chair. I'll kill that man yet, Selby, you'll see," he continued with concentrated hatred in his tone, "or he'll kill me; mark my words."

Selby had never witnessed so much bitterness—so much venom—in his friend, and he wondered, while he was not surprised, when he considered the heavy losses he had met with that evening.

Mr. Grey, accompanied by Selby, walked home, and, letting himself in with his night-key, turned on the threshold to shake hands with his companion. He was perfectly calm and self-possessed now, and with a smile said: "I suppose I need hardly ask you to come in at this hour?"

"Hardly," said Selby; "but I intend to pay my respects to Miss Grey in the afternoon; you know I have not called yet."

"Tell you what you'll do; you'll come and have dinner with us—we dine at six—and I'll explain everything to my daughter."

"Nothing would give me more pleasure, old fellow; but it is hardly the correct thing, you know."

"Oh! never mind ceremony," answered Mr. Grey; "say you will come."

"Well, well, I'll come with pleasure; but, by Jove! I don't know what Miss Grey will think of me."

"Then we'll expect you," said Mr. Grey.

"Don't forget to explain the reason of my not having called," urged Selby.

"I'll attend to that, believe me," replied Mr. Grey; and wishing his companion good-night, he closed the door and softly ascended to his room.

Selby went home perplexed and delighted—perplexed at the strange character of the man he had just parted from, and delighted at the prospect of meeting Minna Grey once more.

When Mr. Grey was alone in his chamber he gave

vent to his feelings. He cursed Langton and vowed vengeance against him. Not only did he hate the man for winning so much of his money, but the idea that he had been so thoroughly vanquished in play before his boon companions rankled in his mind. Then his thoughts turned to his schemes in regard to Selby. He was fully determined that Minna should become the wife of his friend. He knew that Selby was dissolute and careless, but he would be immensely wealthy, and it was the young man's riches he coveted. He cared very little whether Minna would be happy or not—just as Elsie foresaw. He regarded only the fact that it would be to his advantage to have a rich son-in-law, especially, he thought, if I make many more such losses as I have to-night.

At the breakfast-table Mr. Grey intimated to Minna that he would bring a friend to dine with him in the evening, and asked her to be prepared to meet him. He represented Selby as one to whom he was under obligations for many acts of friendship, and endeavored to interest his daughter by that means. But Minna remembered the words of Elsie, warning her against her father's friends, and although she resolved to receive Selby cordially for the sake of her parent, she determined to discourage as far as possible any further acquaintance.

When Selby, therefore, made his appearance in the evening with Mr. Grey, Minna received him graciously, and delighted her father's heart by showing every possible attention to his guest. But Selby, notwithstanding this, was far from satisfied with his visit. Although he was a brilliant conversationalist, and knew how to make himself agreeable to the gentler sex, he could not help

feeling that he had failed utterly in interesting Minna. As a hostess, she was most attentive ; as a guest he had nothing to complain of, but he seemed unable to make any advance with his fair companion towards a more intimate acquaintance.

Mr. Grey did not fail to observe Selby's disappointment, but he consoled himself with the idea that it was owing to Minna's timidity more than to any desire on her part to repulse his friend, and he calculated that by throwing her into Selby's company as much as possible, he would succeed in bringing about the marriage he had set his heart upon.

Minna had a very sweet voice, which had been carefully trained, and, in addition, she was an accomplished musician on the harp and piano. Her mother during her life had bestowed great care in the education of her daughter, and before her death she had instructed Elsie to see that the very best teachers should be engaged to complete what she had commenced. Elsie had prevailed, therefore, on Mr. Grey to spare no expense in finishing Minna's education, and amongst other accomplishments, music formed a prominent part.

Minna, at her father's request, sang and played several times during the evening — indeed she was rather glad to do so in order to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with Selby. The latter was enchanted with the brilliancy of the fair performer, but he would willingly have foregone the pleasure, to have received some little sign that he would be regarded by her as a welcome visitor at the house. He had hinted, in fact, how pleased he would be if he were allowed to visit occasionally, but Minna had studiously avoided responding.

Selby was perplexed to understand the evident cool-

ness with which his advances were received, but he went away from Mr Grey's house more in love than ever with Minna, and determined, if possible, to overcome her repugnance to his society. Why Minna should dislike him puzzled him exceedingly, and the only solution he could surmise was that some one else had a prior claim to her affections, and that she, from a feeling of loyalty to the absent lover, thought it her duty to discourage the attentions of another. Not that Selby had shown any marked attention to Minna. He was too much a man of the world to have committed any such blunder, but he knew that he was very much in love, and that women are very quick to discern such a state of feeling, and to either encourage or resent it, as the circumstances of the case may dictate. He felt that he must have in some way allowed his love for the girl to have shown itself to her either in his looks or voice, and that she had instantly detected it.

Thus he reasoned in his own mind as he walked home to his rooms after leaving Mr Grey's ; and before he went to bed that night he resolved, if possible, to find out exactly how the case stood, and if, as he supposed, there was another lover in the question, he decided to go at once to Minna and ask her to accept him as a friend, if not as a lover.

Selby, in truth, possessed a fine sense of honor in such matters.

He was not a believer in the adage that "all is fair in love ;" on the contrary, he thought that where a man had fairly secured the love of a woman it was dishonorable on the part of another to endeavor to destroy so sacred a bond. If, however, he should learn that there was no other lover in the case, he made up his mind to

persevere in his endeavor to win Minna by every honorable means in his power. He little imagined that Mr. Grey was scheming to obtain him for a son-in-law, or that the fact of his being an intimate friend of her father was sufficient to prejudice Minna against him. It remained for him to find out these truths at a later date, when he discovered to his sorrow how duped both he and Minna had been by Mr. Grey.

CHAPTER VII.

It seemed as if Mr. Gray's encounter with Langton was the turning-point in his career as a gambler. From that time his once proverbial success turned to ill-luck, and his losses became heavier as he grew more and more reckless. He was possessed by a strange infatuation to play with Langton, always hoping against hope that the tide of fortune would turn in his favor. At last the strain on his mind began to affect his health, and he became peevish, restless, and frequently had recourse to brandy to keep up his spirits. People wondered at this change in a man of Mr. Grey's callous temperament, but they could form no idea how heavy his losses had been, or how near he was to the verge of ruin. When Richard Grey met with his first reverses, he thought more of the effect it would have on his standing amongst the gambling fraternity than the actual loss of money he sustained; but as drain after drain on his wealth succeeded each other at short intervals, he began to realize how desperate his position was becoming, and how quickly poverty, which he dreaded so much, might overtake him. Still he could not free himself from the infatuation of playing with Langton, whom he had begun to regard as an evil genius.

During all this time, however, not one thought entered this selfish man's mind of the position he was fast re-

ducing his daughter to. He never considered how hard it was for a young girl, reared from infancy amidst luxury, to be suddenly confronted with the cold world in poverty and want. It never occurred to him that he had been instrumental in bringing his daughter into contact with the pleasures of society, only to hurl her at one blow into a life of misery and suffering. He had not succeeded as well as he had expected in bringing about a marriage between Minna and his friend Selby. The latter, it is true, had managed to become a frequent visitor at Mr. Grey's, and had even gone the length of expressing to Minna the state of his feelings towards her, but so far he had received no encouragement from her ; but as there was no rival to dread, he still indulged the hope of winning her. Mr. Grey had not been able to mould Minna to his will, so far as Selby was concerned, and this thought rankled in his mind in conjunction with the desperate condition of his own affairs. Minna could not avoid liking Selby as a friend ; he was very kind and considerate towards her—always trying to please her. He even went so far as to abandon many of his dissolute habits for her sake, although she was not aware of this change in him for the better, but the alteration in his mode of life made him a more acceptable companion than he otherwise would have been. His feelings towards women were of a more refined character than are generally to be found amongst men of the world, and as he was a strictly honorable man, he could not fail to create a favorable impression in the mind of a girl so pure and innocent as Minna. Still she did not love him, and Selby felt it keenly, because he knew that while love was lacking he could never expect to make her his wife.

Matters were in this stage in the Grey family when

Tim Hucklebury became very much exercised over the condition of his master. He had observed with deep concern the great change which had come over Mr. Grey, and he was grieved to see the anxiety of his young mistress in regard to her father's state of health. Mr. Grey had altogether ignored Tim of late. He seldom informed him of his movements, and never took him, as he had been accustomed to do, when visiting his haunts. The fact is, Mr. Grey did not wish even his confidential servant to witness his discomfiture at the gaming-table. During the zenith of his success he had been proud of showing Tim his great skill, and now that luck had turned against him he dreaded even the ridicule of his servant.

Tim however was not content to remain in a state of uncertainty. He felt, as he remarked to himself, that something was up, and that something he was bound to find out. He knew there was no good going to his master, as he would probably in that case be told to mind his own business; but he resolved to go to Selby, with whom he was a great favorite, and from whom he felt sure he could obtain some clue to his master's troubles.

Accordingly one day he presented himself before Selby as that gentleman was in the act of dressing.

"Good-morning, Tim," said Selby. 'What brings you here? any message from Mr. Grey?"

"No, sir; Mr. Grey never sends me with any messages now. He don't take any notice of me any more, and I've been a faithful servant to him, sir."

"That you have, Tim—that you have—not a better lad in St. Louis than yourself; but what is the matter? nothing gone wrong, I hope." Selby said this with some anxiety, for he had observed with wonder and regret the great alteration which had taken place in Mr. Grey.

"Well, sir, nothing particular has gone wrong, but I'm mighty troubled about my master and don't know what to make of him lately."

"You are not the only one, Tim," said Selby, giving a finishing touch to his necktie and then proceeding to fill his meerschaum pipe. "It's the whole talk at the rooms just now."

"I took the liberty of coming to you to speak about it, sir, knowing you were his friend; and seeing as how you've been always very kind to me, sir, I thought you'd pardon me doing so."

"Certainly, Tim; but I do not know that I can throw much light upon it. Mr. Grey of late keeps very much to himself, you know; I almost think he avoids me sometimes."

"That is bad, sir. When a man keeps out of the way of his best friends, and don't even trust his faithful servants like me, sir, depend upon it there's something up."

"I don't think matters have been going on all right with Mr. Grey for some time, to tell you the truth, Tim; but you know we all have our seasons of ill luck. Look at me, for instance; it is ill luck pretty near all the time in my case, but I always thought Grey could stand anything—he seemed like a man of iron to me."

"It must be something uncommon bad, sir, and it makes my heart sore to see him; he ain't at all like my master of old, and then there's Miss Minna, poor thing! she's just worrying all the time about her father. I can't stand it—something's got to be done, sir, and I am going to do it."

"Spoken like a little man," said Selby; "but what do you propose to do Tim?"

"Would you mind answering a few questions, if you can, sir, and then I'll tell you what I'll do."

"If I can be of any service to you, Tim, you can depend upon it I will do all I can. Go ahead, my boy, with your questions."

"Have you been out much with Mr. Grey lately, sir?"

"Not as much as I used to be; but occasionally I've been with him."

"Has he had bad luck when you've been with him?"

"Confounded bad luck, my boy; but that can't affect Grey; he's able to stand it you know."

"You weren't with him all the time, sir, and you don't know how a man like Mr. Grey will play if he's drove to it. I know him better than y

"That may be, Tim; but go on."

"Did you notice what kind o' chap that was playing with him, and if he has played more 'an once with him?"

"By Jove! Yes, the fellow's name is Langton, and Grey seems to play always with him of late; but there's nothing wrong there, Tim. Grey himself acknowledges that Langton plays a square game."

"Maybe," said Tim; "but what sort o' looking chap is he?"

"Pretty much the same cut as Grey himself; that is about the best description I can give of him."

"I'd like to see them play, sir, the next time," said Tim, "if you'd only help me."

"Why that's easy enough. You've got the entree to the rooms, my boy, whenever you like. I'll find out the time and let you know."

"That ain't it, sir; that's not what I want altogether.

Mr. Grey never takes me out now, and if he saw me in the room he'd ship me the next day. No, sir, 't won't do to have him see me."

"Well, my boy, I don't see exactly how you're going to look on at the game without Mr. Grey seeing you."

"He might see me and mightn't know me, sir. Could I fix myself up so as not to look like Tim Huckleбury, and trust to your getting me into the rooms?"

"Oh! I see, you want to disguise yourself. Well, it might be managed, but what will you appear as—an elderly, respectable gentleman or an old woman selling apples? In the latter case I couldn't get you into the rooms. Ha! ha! ha!" and Selby laughed heartily at the idea of Tim's proposed masquerade. "But now, Tim, speaking seriously, what do you think you will gain by all this? and besides, if you were discovered you would get into a serious scrape with Grey. It is not going to be an easy matter to disguise your expressive features," and Selby laughed again at Tim's quaint expression.

"It is true, sir, I ain't a beauty, but I'd make a lovely green-horn, just arrived, sir. Let me alone, Mr. Selby. Mr. Grey will never know me. I won't get into a scrape if you'll only let me know in time when my master is going to meet Langton, and if you will get me into the rooms. Will you do it, sir? It's for my master's and my young mistress' sake."

"Of course I'll do it," said Selby—Tim's latter plea being all powerful—"but you haven't told me what you expect to gain by all this."

"Will you leave it to me, sir, and not ask me to say any more. I might be all wrong, sir; but when you come that night will you bring a couple of revolvers with

you. We may need 'em—no saying. I'll have mine with me."

"The devil! Tim; you're on the war-path, by Jove! You're going to get me into a deuce of a scrape I see; but I said I would help you, although I have not the least idea what you are up to. I will send word to you, my boy, and will go prepared to back you up if necessary."

"I always knew you were made of the right stuff," said Tim, "and I am much obliged for your not asking me to tell you what I think, which may be a fool's errand after all."

"You're a curious boy, Tim, but a good, faithful lad. You've wakened me up in earnest to know what you are after."

Tim again thanked Selby and withdrew well pleased at the result of his interview. He had been so much accustomed to frequent gambling dens that he had formed very correct ideas in regard to their frequenters. He had learned to have implicit faith in his master's play, and when he was informed by Selby of Mr. Grey's repeated losses at the hands of one individual, he had instantly formed his own plan to investigate the cause of his master's unprecedented ill luck. The success of his plans, and the result of his investigation will be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

JUST before dusk one evening, a few days after his interview with Selby, Tim happened to be loitering near the window of the library, and observed his master and Minna standing in the room, evidently engaged in very earnest conversation. He had time to see that Minna's face looked very white and her manner very excited, when the blind was quickly closed by Mr. Grey, shutting out any further view into the room. Tim, however, had seen enough to make him anxious to know more of what was going on, and accordingly he sauntered quietly up quite close to the window, where he was able to distinguish what was being said. He did not do this from any idle curiosity; but as he had undertaken the task of finding out what was the trouble with his master, he was on the alert for any incident which might serve as a clue for him to work upon. He at once formed the idea that this interview between Mr. Grey and his daughter would throw some light on the subject, and concluded that he would be justified in acting the part of a listener. The first words he heard came from the lips of his master.

"Minna!" said Mr. Grey, "it is useless for me to conceal the fact any longer from you, I am next thing to a ruined man—and something must be done to prevent utter exposure."

"I am very sorry, father," answered Minna; "I have felt for some time that you were troubled, but what need we care for exposure, so long as there is nothing dishonorable to be ashamed of. Surely poverty is no disgrace."

"No disgrace!" exclaimed her father; "you know little of the world. To be poor is to be treated as if you were disgraced: to be shunned by your most intimate friends,—and to be regarded as if you had committed some heinous sin. No! no! the world may forgive a crime, but it never will condone a man's misfortune in becoming poor."

"I cannot understand it, father; it seems too dreadful what you say; surely people are not so cruel as you represent them."

"I am merely reciting to you the experience of every-day life. If a poor man becomes rich he is honored, and the means he has used to acquire wealth is seldom questioned; but let a rich man become suddenly poor, and the vilest reasons are set afloat to account for his change in fortune. He may be an honest man, but he seldom gets any credit for the virtue, so long as he remains in poverty."

"I thought you were very wealthy, father."

"So I was; but I have met with some very serious losses during the past few months, and now I can hardly call the house we live in our own."

"My poor father, how I wish it was in my power to assist you!"

We may explain to our readers at this stage, that Minna had no knowledge of her father's gambling propensities. She knew that he possessed dissolute habits, and that he was addicted to the gay pleasures of a man

of the world, but she had no idea that he was a confirmed gambler. She therefore attributed his monetary difficulties to unfortunate speculations, and consequently felt sincere sympathy for him. It could hardly be called filial love which she experienced at this time towards Mr. Grey. He was too selfish and cold, even during his best moments, to create any such sentiment in her breast; but she certainly felt a greater tenderness for him than she had ever done at any other time during her life. He was not slow to observe this in her, and he therefore resolved to take advantage of it at once, so he replied:

"You have it in your power to assist me, Minna, but I fear the sacrifice will prove too great for you to make. Yet it might save me."

"What is it, father, and if it is possible—if—if—I can do it with honor to myself and to you, I will do anything to save you."

"I will never ask my daughter to do anything dishonorable, even to save her father," said Mr. Grey coldly.

"Oh, father!" replied Minna pleadingly, "you do not understand me. I cannot express myself properly. There are some questions of honor which women view differently from men; but I cannot explain myself. I am only making matters worse, I did not mean to offend you, father."

Minna had an idea that Mr. Grey wished to propose to her a marriage with some of his rich friends, who, as a son-in-law, would be likely to assist him, and the very thought was abhorrent to her.

"I am not offended," replied Mr. Grey, "but I think you are speaking in riddles. I have no idea of what you

mean ; but I will state at once how you can assist me, and put an end to any misunderstanding."

"Yes, do father, and I am sure I will be able to do what you wish."

"I will first try to explain how your assistance may prove valuable to me, so that you may realize the service it is in your power to render me. I have securities which are pledged for a certain sum, greatly below their value; if I could redeem these securities, I would be able to realize sufficient by their sale to enable me to tide over my difficulties for the present, and probably avert ruin altogether. Do you understand what I have been saying, Minna?"

"I think I do," she answered. "You mean that a certain sum of money will enable you to repay a debt for which some of your property is held as security, and that if you could redeem and sell that property you could get sufficient money to pay other debts."

"Yes, that is it ; you are wonderfully clever for a girl of your age ; but there is another feature in the transaction which you seem to have overlooked—if I do not repay this loan for which the property is held as security, the property itself is forfeited and I lose all."

"This does not seem fair," said Minna.

"It is so in the bond, as Shylock would remark," replied Mr. Grey.

"But how can I procure the money you require?" asked Minna.

"By what I know you will deem a great sacrifice—your mother's jewels."

"My mother's jewels!" exclaimed Minna, aghast at the thought of parting with her most sacred treasure. "Surely, father, you do not mean what you say."

"I have exhausted every resource before applying to you for this. It is the only method I know of obtaining money—you see therefore the strait I am reduced to."

"Oh! this is dreadful," said Minna, bursting into tears—"Oh! why did you not tell me of this sooner, and I would gladly have given up house, furniture, servants, and every comfort I have had rather than relinquish the dying gift of my poor mother."

"I was aware that you would consider it a great sacrifice; but I cannot understand how you can prefer the possession of a few trinkets to the salvation of your father from ruin," said Mr. Grey, with unfeeling selfishness.

"It is not their value, father—it is not their value. Oh! how I wish that they were worthless jewels that I might retain them. It is because they belonged to mother—they were her last gift to me. It is not because they are beautiful in themselves or that I am proud of their possession, but it is because they were mother's — because she wore them, and they have always appeared like a sacred trust confided to me by her. Oh! father, is there no other way—is there no other way?"

The poor girl was dreadfully agitated, and even Mr. Gray, callous though he was, felt the cruelty he was being guilty of, and as if to lighten the blow he had struck, he said:

"I do not see that there is any necessity for your parting with the jewels altogether. You may not be aware of it, but they are of great value,—so great indeed that I always considered you were running a risk by keeping them in the house, almost at the mercy of burg-

lars. I can effect a sufficient loan on them to answer my purpose, and I can afterwards redeem them."

"Are you sure, father, that you will be able to redeem them?"

Mr. Grey had forgotten the almost hopeless picture he had drawn of his affairs, but Minna had not, and although she brightened somewhat at the prospect of not losing her mother's gift altogether, she was unable to place implicit faith in her father's promise to redeem them.

It is needless to say that Mr. Grey had been imposing on his daughter by uttering a tissue of falsehoods. So far as the desperate condition of his affairs was concerned, he had spoken the truth. The very house he lived in, the furniture, and his whole property, was mortgaged to the fullest extent; his investments had all been realized on, and the proceeds squandered in his luckless play, and he was actually at his wit's end to know how to raise money to go on with. The jewels which his daughter possessed he knew to be very valuable, they having been given to her mother by her parents on her marriage day as a part of her inheritance. They were the last resource, it is true, of Mr. Grey in his dire necessity, but he stated a falsehood to his daughter when he said that he required the money to redeem other securities of greater value. He simply wanted the jewels to stake the proceeds of their sale in play, as he had already done the whole of his fortune. He therefore had no right to throw out any hope to Minna of being able to recover them; it was merely a bait, a cruel excuse, to induce her to part with her treasure.

Tim, who had overheard the whole of the conversa-

tion, was amazed when he learned the precarious state of his master's finances, and he was thunderstruck at hearing one whom he had always regarded as the personification of haughty pride, so far demean himself as to seek to despoil his daughter to save himself. It was a terrible blow to the high opinion which Tim entertained regarding his master; but the lad had yet to learn how low the love of play will sink a man when he is obliged to resort to questionable means in order to satisfy his craze for gambling.

He was more than ever resolved to penetrate the secret of Mr. Grey's losses, and began turning over in his mind some plan by which he would be able to save Minna's jewels. He was glad therefore to hear Mr. Grey say to his daughter that he would give her time to think over his request, and not press for a reply till the following afternoon.

Tim very soon determined upon a course of action, and the first step he took was the next morning to go and pay another visit to Selby's rooms. He knew that gentleman to be very liberal in money matters and also that he was able to command a considerable sum whenever he required it. Tim would not have hesitated a moment to ask Selby for a favor in his own behalf, but when on his way to solicit one for his master he realized the difficulty of the task he had voluntarily undertaken. In the first place the thought occurred to him that probably Mr. Grey was already greatly in debt to Selby, and in the next he did not wish to acquaint the latter with the desperate condition of his master's affairs, and how to frame an excuse for asking him what must appear to be an extraordinary interference on his part puzzled him greatly. We are, however, anticipating somewhat,

and in order to be more explicit, must let our readers into the secret of Tim's plans. He had concluded from the conversation he had overheard in the library, that Mr. Grey was completely out of funds, and unless he could raise some money, he would not be in a position to meet Langton. Now Tim desired that a meeting should take place between the two gamblers, but at the same time he did not wish that the means should be supplied at the expense of Minna's jewels. His first step, therefore, was to procure the money for Mr. Grey to go on with, and he had resolved upon applying to Selby for a loan ; but how to induce that gentleman to grant it without letting him into the secret was a matter which troubled Tim considerably. After having arranged for the money for Mr. Grey, he intended to have an interview with his young mistress and confess to overhearing the interview between her and her father, and he hoped to hit upon some plan by which she would co-operate with him to carry out the schemes he had in view.

When Tim presented himself before Selby, the latter at once acquainted him with the fact that a meeting between Mr. Grey and Langton had been arranged for that evening. No time was therefore to be lost, and Tim was rather staggered at the amount of work before him. He, in a very matter-of-fact manner, arranged the details for his admission into the rooms to witness the game between Mr. Grey and Langton, and made an appointment with Selby for that evening. He then told that gentleman that he had learned (he did not explain how) that his master had been unable to realize on some securities, and that he was afraid lack of funds might oblige Mr. Grey to postpone the meeting with his rival. He then

asked Selby whether he could manage to advance the money to Mr. Grey without letting him know that he (Tim) had been instrumental in the matter. He stated as his reason for this that he was particularly anxious for the meeting with Langton to take place at once, and that he knew it would result favorably to his master. Selby, to Tim's joy, at once fell in with his views, the incentive being the curiosity to see the result of the game, and also a desire to save, if possible, the father of the girl he loved from utter ruin ; for it was no secret to Selby that Mr. Grey's finances must be in a crippled state from the heavy losses he had suffered. He had no idea, however, that Mr. Grey's case was so bad as it really was. He therefore told Tim that he would see his master at once, and that he would have no difficulty in getting him to accept the required money, as he would give it not as a loan, but as a stake to be played for in the game. He knew Grey sufficiently to believe that he would not hesitate to play with Langton, even though he had only the money belonging to another to risk in the game.

Tim went away in high spirits at his success and immediately proceeded to obtain an interview with Minna. Here another difficulty presented itself, how would he be able to account satisfactorily to his young mistress for having played the part of an eavesdropper, a character so mean in Tim's own estimation, that he wondered how he would ever be able to acknowledge what he had been guilty of. But consoling himself with the thought that the end would justify the means, he made up his mind to give some plausible reason for his conduct and endeavor to interest Minna so as to gain her co-operation. Accordingly he went to her, and this is what he said :

"I have come, Miss, to tell you that I heard what my master said to you last night, though I didn't mean to—I couldn't help myself."

"You heard what my father said to me last night," exclaimed Minna; "how could you have done so when he and I were alone—unless," she added contemptuously, "you were listening at the keyhole, which I hardly expected from you, Tim."

"No, Miss—no, don't think so bad as that of me. I'll tell you at once how it happened. You see, Miss, I was having a quiet smoke after supper, and I lay down where it was nice and cool just under the library-window. I hadn't been there long before I heard voices, and then I saw that the window was a bit open, and just as I was rising to go away your father came and pulled down the blind; I saw his face, and I never saw it look like that before. He didn't seem to notice that the window wasn't quite shut, for he didn't close it, and I was afraid to move for fear he'd hear me. He frightened me, Miss, by his looks, and so I heard all he said to you, but you needn't mind my knowing it, for I love master and you Miss, too much to ever repeat what I heard."

Minna was quite taken aback by this disclosure of Tim's, and was at a loss what to think about it. She had supposed, of course, that she alone was in the secret of her father's embarrassment, and here she had just been told that a servant in the house knew as much of it as she did. She had every confidence in Tim. She knew the lad was very much attached to both her father and herself, but it was very galling to her proud spirit to hear that he shared in the knowledge of the family misfortunes. She was, however, thoroughly astonished when Tim announced to her his desire to save her

jewels from getting into her father's hands. She at first felt a sort of bewilderment at the audacity of the proposition coming from such a quarter, but when she saw how earnest Tim appeared to be in what he proposed to her, she felt disposed at least to listen to him.

"Miss," said Tim, "you know I am a tried servant in this family, and I'd give my right arm to serve either you or Mr. Grey, and so I hope you won't take offence at what I am going to say. These jewels must be kept out of Mr. Grey's hands, at least till after to-morrow. If you will help me to do this, Miss, I think he wont require them at all."

"They are very precious to me, because they belonged to my mother," answered Minna; "but I do not see how I can refuse to give them to my father if he insists upon having them; therefore I fear I cannot be of any assistance, Tim, even if I desired to be; and then how do you know so much about Mr. Grey's affairs as you profess?"

"Don't ask me, Miss, please, to tell you how I came to know what I do; be sure I am only trying to serve the master, but I feel certain he's the victim of a scoundrel, and I don't want to see everything sacrificed. I think your father will find out all about it before to-morrow night, and that is why I think he won't want your jewels."

"If I was only sure, Tim, that you have not been misled; if I was only sure. But how can we prevent father getting the jewels? He is certain to ask for them."

"I am sure of one thing, Miss, and you'll live to see I'm right; it wont do Mr. Grey any earthly good to get the jewels, and as to preventing him from getting them

this afternoon, I tell you what can be done. You pretend to be very ill, and I'll go and tell my master that I have been sent for the doctor. I have reason for thinking that he won't trouble you about them when he hears you are sick, and he'll be likely to think that you need the doctor from worrying over what he said to you yesterday."

"You are a strange lad, Tim. If you are misleading me I will never forgive you; but I will do as you say, it is my only chance to save them; but if father comes to harm through what I am going to do, I will never allow you to speak to me again; remember that, Tim."

"Trust to me, Miss, I'll never do harm or let it be done, if I can help it, to either you or Mr. Grey."

"Then I will consent to this lie; but oh! it is dreadful having to do such things."

Tim was jubilant over the success of his plans, and went immediately to find Selby, from whom he learned that Mr. Grey had accepted the money to play it against Langton, the understanding being that if there should be any gain, half should be his, the other to go to Selby; and if any loss, the latter took all the risk. Few men would have agreed to throw their money away as Selby had on this occasion; but then he had a motive which induced him, namely, the sweet face of Minna Grey, the daughter of the man he was assisting, ever before him in his thoughts, and besides, he did not forget that he owed his life to Mr. Grey. It never occurred to him that he was probably only heaping on more misery by aiding the father in his gambling habits. If it ever did, he consoled himself with the idea that Tim was on the track of something which would put a stop to future heavy losses.

Tim, after leaving Selby, and knowing that Mr. Grey had money to go on with, went to the latter and informed him of his daughter's illness, and, as he had predicted, his master deferred making any further demand on Minna for the jewels. We will now see how Tim succeeded in the gambling rooms.

CHAPTER IX.

We have described Tim already as possessing courage combined with what is vulgarly known as cheek, and we think we have shown that he could boast of these qualities in a very high degree. On the mere supposition, supported of course by his confidence in Mr. Grey's skill at play, that that gentleman had been worsted at cards through unfair means, he had made arrangements to find out whether his view was correct. He had induced his mistress to act a lie to her father, and he had prevailed upon Selby to advance a large sum of money at the risk of losing it altogether. If he failed in discovering any treachery on the part of Langton, he would have played the part of eavesdropper for nothing; he would have raised hopes in the mind of his young mistress only to dash them to pieces immediately afterwards, and he would have induced Selby to make a very heavy loss to no purpose whatsoever. Tim was not blind to the position he had placed himself in, and his feelings were not the most comfortable as he prepared himself for his appointment with Selby. He knew that the success of his plot depended almost entirely on his getting a perfect disguise for himself, and for this reason he had secured the services of a friend, who being engaged in one of the theatres as costumer, was conversant with all sorts of masquerades. He had selected the character of

a young English swell just out, and desirous of seeing life in all its phases, and so well did his friend manage the disguise that when Tim called on Selby, at the appointed hour, that individual did not recognize his visitor. Tim laughed heartily when Selby requested to know his name and the nature of his business.

"I rather guess, sir, my master won't know Tim Hucklebury, as Tim Hucklebury appears at present." Instead of the clean shaven face, Tim sported a fine mustache and beard, and by some manipulation of the eyebrows, the whole expression of his face was changed, He had procured a nobby suit of clothes, cut in English style, and in his hand he carried a slender umbrella. The latter, however, Selby declared was too far-fetched altogether, but Tim insisted upon retaining it. Selby looked upon the whole affair as the best joke he had enjoyed for many a day, but Tim regarded it as a very serious affair, so much so that he asked for some brandy and water and drank off a stiff glass of the mixture, to steady his nerves. Before leaving for the gambling rooms, Tim said to Selby:

"If you see me take out my handkerchief from my right hand pocket and place it in the left, you may depend upon it, sir, I will have discovered something. Do not appear to take any notice of anything that may happen, unless I draw my right hand across my forehead, in which case, sir, I will come and speak to you, for I will have something to tell you; but if you see my master begin to win, then keep him to it, sir, and let him play Langton as long as he'll stand it; and, sir, in that case, I leave it to you to keep Langton up to it. When his money runs out, get him to borrow—and get people to lend him—play him for all he's worth. And one

more thing, sir, when you go into the room, give my master a word of encouragement—back him up well, sir, for he hasn't as much nerve as he used to have."

Selby looked admiringly at Tim. "You are a cool hand, my lad, and no mistake; you have everything cut and dry, and it won't be your fault if you don't find something wrong, if there is anything to find. But what do you want with the revolvers, Tim? you told me to take mine."

"I've got a pair here, sir," slapping his hip. "We may not need them, but it's well to be prepared you know. You ought always to have one, sir, when you go to such places."

"I always carry one, Tim, ever since the night Grey saved my life. I learned a lesson then."

Selby and Tim now set out for the rooms, and on arriving there the former, being a well known frequenter, had no difficulty in obtaining admission for Tim, whom he introduced as a new arrival on the look out for sport.

Tim managed to keep up his assumed character very well, and adopted the wise course of speaking as little as possible to the gamblers who were present. He experienced some difficulty in avoiding the numerous invitations to take a hand in play; but as he was quick-witted he succeeded in keeping free without drawing any particular attention towards himself by so doing.

When he and Selby arrived at the rooms, neither Mr. Grey nor Langton had put in an appearance, but in a short time they arrived, and after some preliminary conversation, sat down opposite each other to begin the work. As usual, when these two noted gamblers met in play, they attracted quite a number of spectators to witness the game, a circumstance which had of late

rather annoyed Mr. Grey. But as none of them interfered in any way, nor allowed themselves to express an opinion aloud while the game was being played, he could not object to their looking on. It was well known amongst the sporting fraternity that Mr. Grey had at last met with more than his equal, and, in truth, there was very little sympathy felt for him in the heavy losses he had suffered. Mr. Grey realized this, and accordingly he disliked having witnesses to his numerous defeats; but on this occasion the few encouraging words which Selby had spoken in his ear before he sat down to play seemed to nerve him, and he did not appear to notice the presence of his associates who crowded near the table. Tim, as the play progressed, moved here and there, watching Langton sometimes and then directing his attention to the by-standers. Selby in turn watched Tim with furtive glances and observed that the latter kept his glances directed particularly towards the proprietor, who seemed to take an unusual interest in the game. Tim, however, was very guarded in his movements, and only that Selby happened to be in his secret, he never could have detected anything out of common in the lad's movements. The man who seemed to attract Tim's attention so particularly was one whom none would ever have suspected of doing a mean act. He bore a high character amongst gamblers for fairness, and was regarded as altogether above any petty underhand tricks, and was therefore the last man whom Selby supposed Tim ought to watch. But Tim had his own views on the matter, and ere long Selby perceived him take his handkerchief out of his right pocket, wipe his forehead, and then place it in the left. He then came to Selby and drew him to one side.

"Have you noticed, sir," he asked, "whether Mr. Grey always sits where he is now when he is playing with Langton?"

"Yes," said Selby, "he has taken that seat every time that I have been here."

"All right, sir, I'm on the track, I think," said Tim; "but don't forget what I asked you—if you see Mr. Grey begin to win, keep him up to it. Get him to play Langton for all he's worth."

All this was spoken in a low voice, and then Tim regained his place near the table, and in a short time Selby saw him speak to the proprietor, and immediately afterwards the two withdrew to the sideboard, where they drank together. They then left the room and were absent for some time when Tim made his appearance alone, and Selby noticed that his eye shone brighter, and that he had an air of triumph about him.

When Tim and the gambler left the room, and when the latter did not return, Langton could not conceal a slight appearance of uneasiness from being observed by Selby who was watching him closely. It seemed as if something had occurred to upset his equanimity. Mr. Grey about the same time made one or two lucky hits in succession which seemed to embarrass Langton more and more. It was the first success which Mr. Grey had experienced for months, and it seemed to inspire him with renewed vigor, and to give him that self-confidence which latterly he had begun to lose. Langton, on the other hand, appeared to be perplexed, and his self-possession was evidently disturbed by something.

Tim, in the mean time, hovered near the table, his eyes fixed on Langton, until that individual seemed inclined to resent the scrutiny. But Tim did not wish for

a scene, and so when he saw that his presence had become offensive, he withdrew to another part of the room, whispering as he passed Selby: "Now is the time, sir; keep him to it. I've got the deadwood on Langton and he knows there's something up. Play him for all he's worth; it's your only chance."

The change in the fortune of the two players excited a good deal of interest on the part of the by-standers, and as Mr. Grey was well known to have been a heavy loser to Langton, the latter could not very well withdraw from the game so long as his antagonist wished it to go on. Mr. Grey's success continued, and Langton, who had lost his habitual coolness, became more and more demoralized as the play went on. At last he threw up his hand, saying that he was cleaned out; but Selby, who had been at work, at once declared that he was not yet satisfied the affair should drop, and appealed to Mr. Grey if he was not an interested party who had a right to speak. Mr. Grey at once acknowledged that Selby had an interest conjointly with him in the stakes, and a suggestion being thrown out that, as Mr. Grey had been obliged to borrow on previous occasions to keep the game going, Langton should now follow the same course. Several individuals came forward and offered to lend their money as they considered Langton to be perfectly safe to trust. Langton could not refuse to accept the offers thus made, although he evidently did so with a bad grace, and consequently the game went on, lasting till the morning, when Mr. Grey arose from the table a heavy winner. The whole affair was a surprise to everybody, but to no one more than to Mr. Grey himself, who, as he linked arms with Selby on leaving the rooms, said: "The tide has turned at last, Selby; it was time, for I was

nearly ruined; but I'll win all back now. Where is your friend?"

When Selby looked for Tim he could not find him; the lad had disappeared soon after Langton began to borrow money, but his absence had not been perceived, so intent was everyone on the game.

"I did not see him leave," said Selby, "but I suppose he'll turn up all right. Well, old man, you've had a first-class run of luck to-night, and I'm glad of it."

"It's my turn now to strip Langton as he has done me," said Mr. Grey bitterly, "and by —— I'll do it if it takes a year. I'll be even with him; I always told you I would. He and I are not done with each other by a long shot."

The two friends soon afterwards separated, and Selby went to his rooms, where he found Tim waiting for him.

"I knew my master would not come," said Tim, "because he wants rest to meet Langton again. I was sure he wouldn't come with you and so I came on ahead, for I was afraid he might find me out if he got talking to me. I've been waiting, sir, to tell you all about it."

"By Jove, Tim," replied Selby, "you've worked wonders; how the devil did you manage it, and what was the row?"

"Well, sir, I got it into my head that this Langton had a silent partner, because it wasn't natural for him to beat my master as he was doing, and so I made up my mind to find out for myself whether I was right."

"By Jove!" interrupted Selby, "I might have thought of such a thing in any other place; but, you know, the —— rooms are above anything of the kind—at least," he added, "with regular customers like Grey."

"It was just because my master was playing there that I suspected something. I thought he would likely play a more open hand there than he would do in any other place, and thus give himself away without knowing it; and that's just what he's been doing, sir."

"Well, Tim, you astonish me," exclaimed Selby, "and probably I've been fleeced pretty often in the same way."

"I don't think so, sir; I guess my master was the only one, barring greenhorns, that they tried it on."

"But, Tim, he's the shrewdest man that goes there."

"Yes, sir, but he's been the victim of treachery on the part of one who ought to have been his best friend. The proprietor turned against him, sir."

"Well! well!" said Selby, "the only way I can get at this thing is to let you tell the whole story; so out with it, my lad."

"When I noticed my master sit down with his back to that stained glass door, it was the first thing to attract my attention, and I watched. I then thought I saw something move behind the door, but wasn't sure for a while, until I happened to catch a sight of Mr. Grey's hand, when I saw he wasn't as careful about it as he ought to have been. Sitting as he was, with his back close to the door, he never suspected that anybody could see his cards; but I began to twig something wrong. I know that house, you see, sir, better than you think, and I made up my mind to see who was in the next room. I kind of suspected the proprietor, and so, to make sure, I went and had a drink with him and asked him to step into the passage, as I had something to say to him. You just bet, sir, I put my hand on my revolver when we went outside, and before he knew what I was

about I had thrown open the door leading into the little closet with the stained-glass door, and there was Bill Brown looking through and telegraphing my master's hand to Langton."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Selby, jumping up, "why didn't you tell me, and we would have cleaned out the whole place? By jingo, we'll do it yet—the scoundrels!"

"Wait a bit, sir, wait a bit," said Tim, "I haven't told you all. Before either Brown or the proprietor could wink, I had them both covered with my revolver. I told them if they were wise they would keep quiet, as I didn't mean to peach upon them, but they must do as I wanted. I told them who I was and my business, and agreed if they would both leave the house and let my master have a fair field for the rest of the night I would keep my own counsel. I knew their absence would worry Langton. They agreed and left at once. I locked the little closet and came back to the room. You know the rest, sir."

"But, Tim, Langton must be made to disgorge every cent he has won from your master."

"You've got every dollar you ever will from him, sir. You'll never see Langton again."

"But he must be stopped," said Selby. "By Jove! I'll have him arrested."

"If you come to think of it, sir, it wouldn't do you or my master any good; that is why I told you to play him for all he was worth. I knew it was your last chance, and that he'd skip out after to-night."

"Well, there's Brown and the proprietor; I'll show them up."

"It wont do any manner of good, sir. Brown has gone with Langton; probably they're off already, and I kind

o' guess the —— rooms will simmer down to second. rate after this. I gave my word to the proprietor, and I don't want to have it broken, please sir ; and, besides, I don't want my master to know anything of what I've been telling you ; he'll be awful mad when he finds that Langton has skipped out, but he'll cool down and soon make up for lost time ; he's got his luck back, sir, you know," added Tim, smiling.

As will be seen, however, Tim was mistaken in the effect Langton's disappearance would have on Mr. Grey. Selby was completely dumbfounded at the result of the night's work, and felt rather astonished at his not having discovered the treachery which had been played on his friend Grey. He was really surprised at the shrewd tact with which Tim had conducted the whole affair, but at the same time he was generous enough not to begrudge the lad one whit of the credit that was due to him.

Tim now took his departure, and having changed his disguise for his ordinary dress, gained his room in the Grey mansion without being observed. He had accomplished all that he desired, and felt that his mistress would have no further trouble with her father on account of the jewels, and Selby had made a good investment by letting Mr. Grey have the use of his money. So he went to sleep perfectly satisfied with himself and the world at large.

CHAPTER X.

MINNA in the mean time had been reflecting on the course she had pursued towards her father, and began to regret having consented to the subterfuge of a feigned sickness at Tim's suggestion. The very thought of it became repugnant to her, because nature led her to be frank and open in everything she did, but in this case she had acted a lie which did not seem to her justifiable even to save her mother's jewels. She valued the latter just as much as ever, but she could not view with any satisfaction the means she had adopted to retain them. She therefore had resolved to make one more appeal to her father not to take them from her, and, failing in that, she had made up her mind to relinquish them. But she had no opportunity of obtaining an interview with Mr. Grey to put her resolution into practice, because he left the house the next day without asking to see her, and she had missed meeting him before his departure. She was therefore in a very unhappy state of mind, and, it must be confessed, she felt rather inclined to blame Tim for his interference. The revelation of her father's difficulties had cast a gloom over her spirits, and this, combined with the thought that she had done wrong in disregarding the principles of truth and honesty, which her mother had endeavored to instil into her mind, caused the poor girl a great deal of uneasiness. Her inability

to see her father heightened this feeling, and when Tim presented himself before her she received him very coldly, as if he had been the cause of all her trouble.

Tim, however, was not abashed at this cool reception, but at once stated the result of his plans. He told Minna that Mr. Grey had discovered that he had been literally robbed (which was not the truth, as his master knew nothing of Langton's treachery), and that he had succeeded in recovering a portion of the money he had lost. "My master will not," he concluded, "say anything more to you about the jewels, and he will be all right in a short time; you will see him like his old self, Miss, very soon, depend upon it."

This information was certainly very encouraging to Minna, but she could not help expressing her regret at the part she had played.

"Well, Miss, it was this way," argued Tim, "if you hadn't done as you did, Mr. Grey might have got the jewels and let them out of his hands before he discovered what I've just been telling you about, and in that case, Miss, I am very much afraid you never would have seen them again."

Minna felt that Tim's words were only too true, and, therefore, she said nothing to contradict them, but she cut short the interview, by simply thanking the lad for what he had done, which was all the reward Tim could have wished for.

Notwithstanding the assurance which she had received from Tim in regard to her father's affairs, and the feeling of encouragement it had given her, Minna did not feel satisfied. It seemed as if the shadow of future trouble had fallen across her path; the luxurious home in which she lived, and the comforts which surrounded

her, all seemed out of place, when she considered that at any moment they might be swept away to satisfy her father's creditors. She had never even imagined the possibility of poverty overtaking her ; she had always regarded her father as immensely wealthy, and the fine establishment over which she presided had seemed to her only as a fitting home for people in their position. But now she had learned that there were grave doubts as to whether they ought to live in the expensive style they were doing, and so all pleasure in her home was destroyed. She felt that under the altered circumstances in which her father's difficulties had placed them, they ought to retrench, and give up what now appeared to her as an extravagant mode of living. Although Tim had assured her that all present danger was over, she could not conceal from herself, that what had happened might happen again, and that she was liable at any moment to hear of her father getting into fresh difficulties. Her confidence in her position was therefore destroyed, and with it her peace of mind, so long as she remained in her luxurious home, and she resolved to propose to her father to abandon it for one more in accord with their reduced means. But Minna had no opportunity of doing as she proposed, for she did not see her father again for several months, the cause of which we will now endeavor to explain.

The first thing Mr. Grey did the day following his encounter with Langton was to find Selby ; and intimate to him his intention of arranging at once with his late antagonist for another meeting, in order to follow up the success of the previous night without delay. He was in high spirits, and dwelt exultingly on the prospect of winning back his heavy losses and re-establishing his

financial position on a good footing. Selby pitied him as he listened, because he felt that it would be a terrible blow if Langton had really disappeared ; but he did not state his fears on that point, as he thought it would be better for Mr. Grey to find the truth out himself. Accordingly, at Mr. Grey's request, he accompanied him to find Langton ; but the bird had evidently flown and was not to be found anywhere. Mr. Grey was at a loss to understand it, and finally became very uneasy.

"I can't make it out," he said to Selby. "I don't think Langton is the man to leave town without letting me know when I may expect to see him again. I don't think it would be the correct thing, and Langton I have always found to be very particular in such matters."

"Yes," thought Selby, "when he was winning your money, but now it is a different thing."

When, towards evening, they had found no trace of Langton, Selby said he thought he could find out if he had left the city, if Mr. Grey would agree to wait at his rooms while he made the inquiry.

Mr. Grey at once agreed, as he was tired in body and troubled in mind. He could not avoid feeling some anxiety regarding Langton's strange conduct, and was glad of an opportunity to rest and think.

Selby, in the course of their search for the missing man, had seen the proprietor of the rooms, and he felt sure that individual could give him the information he desired if he could be prevailed upon to do so. He therefore went direct to him and told him plainly that he was in the secret of the treachery which had been practised on Mr. Grey, and gave as a reason for his knowing about it that he had assisted Tim in discovering the villany. He moreover told the proprietor that as yet Mr. Grey knew

nothing about it, but he threatened to acquaint him with the whole story and publish it everywhere, unless he disclosed what he knew of Langton's disappearance. The proprietor, who hoped to avoid the injury which the knowledge of his late conduct towards Mr. Grey would entail upon the business of his gambling rooms, at once agreed to tell Selby all that he knew.

He said that when Langton learned from Brown how their plot had been discovered, he at once made his arrangements to leave by the first train for New York. That he had accordingly gone there, taking Brown with him, but what their further movements might be he could not say, as they had not let him into their confidence. All he knew was that Langton would not return for some time, until at least this affair had time to blow over. Selby felt that the man had told him the truth, and he had nothing else to do but acquaint Mr. Grey with the fact that Langton had left the city with very little probability of ever returning.

When Mr. Grey learned the true state of matters, and that his late antagonist had left for parts unknown, with the greater portion of his money in his possession, he could not credit it at first, but when Selby explained that there could be no doubt as to the correctness of his information then the whole truth seemed to flash upon him.

"Gone!" he said, "gone like a thief. By heavens! I have been literally robbed. There has been some infernal work going on unknown to me, and I am inclined to think, Selby, you know more about it than you wish to tell."

"Do you mean to suspect me of having any connection with what you term infernal work?" asked Selby

haughtily, "if so I would like you to be a little more explicit."

"I have no idea," replied Mr. Grey, "that you are in any way connected with Langton or his doings; but I do think you have some information which you are keeping back from me. How did you learn of his departure for New York?"

"In a very simple manner. I was on my way to the rooms to make inquiries, when I met one of Langton's chums, who told me."

"Are you aware whether he intends to remain in New York, or whether he has gone somewhere else?"

"I know nothing more of Langton's movements than what I have already told you."

"Then I must start immediately for New York. I have not a moment to lose," said Mr. Grey.

"I would let the scoundrel go—I think you are well rid of him—you have never been yourself, old man, since you first met him—Let the villain alone," said Selby.

"Let him alone?" exclaimed Mr. Grey, "ha! ha! ha! that would be a fine way to treat scoundrels like him. No! no! Selby, I'll follow that man if I have to travel all over the world till I meet him, and get satisfaction from him. You little know what you advise when you tell me to let him alone."

"I am perfectly well aware," answered Selby, "that he has won a heap of money from you, and has gone off with it like a cur; but what of that, you'll soon make up for lost time."

"You know nothing about it," said Mr. Grey. "You can form no idea of how much I have lost, for I have never said very much about it to anyone; but now that

this has happened, I will tell you how I am placed, and then we'll see if you'll advise me to leave the scoundrel alone. When I sat down last night to play Langton, the only money I had in the world was what you were kind enough to stake upon the game. I hadn't another dollar, Selby, my fortune gone—my house and even my furniture mortgaged to the fullest extent. I was a desperate man, and God knows what I might have done if luck had gone against me last night; but I won, and just as I saw a prospect of winning back my money, this Langton sneaks off like a low thief. Do you suppose I will sit still while that fellow is luxuriating with my wealth. Oh! no, Selby, I'm not the man to stand that sort of thing quietly."

"By Jove! Grey, I had no idea you were being bled as badly as you say. Why didn't you tell a fellow; you might have trusted me."

"You are the only one to whom I have explained my position; but there is no use crying over spilt milk. I am going to start to-night for New York, and I have several matters to attend to before I go. Will you let me have pen, ink and paper? I must write a note to my daughter. I have not time to return home, as I have to see one or two parties to arrange about my affairs, and the train leaves in a couple of hours."

"Why not postpone your departure till to-morrow; a day will not make any difference," suggested Selby.

"No," said Mr. Grey, "I won't delay an hour. I have too much at stake, and Langton has too much to answer for. I am like a bloodhound on his path from this moment."

"Can I be of any service to you, Grey?" asked Selby, "you know you have only to say the word."

"Yes," said Mr. Grey, "there is the money you let me have yesterday, and there is your share of the winnings. Will you let me have the use of them till I return? I need funds, as you are aware."

"Certainly, old fellow," replied Selby, "and if you want more when you are away, draw on me, I'll honor your drafts depend upon it."

"Thank you, Selby, but I hope to be able to get along with what I have. Langton will not escape me, depend upon it, he won't have an easy road to travel."

"By Jove! I wish you success, old boy," exclaimed Selby.

"There is another thing I wish you would do for me, Selby," said Mr. Grey. "I am going to write a note to my daughter, informing her of my hasty departure; will you kindly deliver it for me? and if I am detained away longer than I expect, I may trouble you to look after some matters for me."

"All right, old chap; just send me word, and I'll attend to things."

Mr. Grey then wrote a short note to Minna, which he handed to Selby; after which he helped himself to a parting glass of brandy-and-water, and bidding his friend good-by, started out on what proved to be a long journey. Selby had refrained from acquainting Mr. Grey with the particulars of Langton's treachery for several reasons—first, because he had promised the proprietor of the rooms not to disclose them; secondly, because he did not wish to get Tim into any trouble with his master; and thirdly, because he felt that Mr. Grey's feelings were bitter enough without any fuel being added to the fire; but he considered it his duty to warn his friend against a repetition of the snare that had been

laid for him, and which had proved so disastrous to him, and, therefore, he told him not to trust his late opponent's honesty in play, as he had heard some strange rumors of his being connected with a gang of swindlers, and advised him if he should have any further encounters with Langton, to keep his cards strictly concealed from view and not to trust even a dead wall behind him when playing. Grey, however, laughed at Selby's suggestion, and would not listen to any idea of his having been cheated, because, as he remarked, he considered himself too old and experienced a hand for anyone to try that game on. Consequently Mr. Grey left St. Louis with no idea that he had been swindled by Langton, but merely that the latter had sneaked off to avoid giving him satisfaction at the gaming-table. This of itself was sufficient in Mr. Grey's mind to sink Langton very low in his estimation, and to make him feel very bitter when he thought of the heavy losses he had suffered at his hands.

Selby was somewhat surprised at Mr. Grey leaving for New York without returning to his house. Any other man but Grey, he thought, would have gone home and said good-by to his daughter, and he could have done it in a quarter of an hour by taking a carriage; but he is a queer fish, and I am not sorry to have an excuse for going in his stead.

The truth is Mr. Grey, as soon as he had no pressing need for Minna's jewels, felt rather ashamed of having asked for them, and he did not care particularly about meeting his daughter in case she might refer to what was to him now an unpleasant subject. Besides this, he did not expect to be absent any length of time. He felt sure of overtaking Langton at New York and obtaining immediate satisfaction, and it was no unusual thing for

him to leave home for a week at a time without acquainting Minna of his departure. In this case, however, he had an object in writing to his daughter, and that was to give Selby an excuse for visiting her. But Mr. Grey, as events proved, did not return to St. Louis as soon as he expected, and ere he saw his daughter Minna again, very important changes had taken place in his household.

Selby had gradually become a regular visitor at the Grey mansion, and so careful had he been in his demeanor towards Minna, so respectful, so kind and considerate in many little attentions which men, as a rule, neglect in their intercourse with women, but which the latter prize very highly when they are the recipients thereof, that the young girl could not fail to receive his visits with some degree of pleasure. Selby, for almost the first time in his life, was on his good behavior while endeavoring to win the love of this young girl, and he really endeavored to abandon some of his dissolute habits; but, alas! he was only acting in accordance with a caprice or passion then dominant, and not from conviction, and, consequently, his improvement was liable to turn out only a temporary one. He moreover made Minna a confidante of several matters connected with his own life. He spoke to her feelingly and lovingly of his parents and their goodness to him, and pictured to her his mother as the kindest and best of women. In justice to Selby we must say that he did not do this for effect; he really loved and was very proud of his father and mother, and found pleasure in speaking of them to Minna. He could not have adopted, however, any better course to raise himself in her esteem, and having gained that point, he had succeeded in taking the first step towards securing her love. He had frequently expressed

a desire that Minna would visit his parents in New York, but as this might have been construed into a forerunner of closer relationship, she had never encouraged the idea; but from the description given her by Selby of his home and its surroundings, she felt that it would be a very pleasant change from the monotony of her everyday life.

When Selby presented himself with the letter from her father, she could hardly conceal the feeling of disappointment which it caused her as she read its contents. She had intended to propose to her father the advisability of moving into less expensive quarters, and of curtailing expenses generally, but now the opportunity of carrying out her good intentions was frustrated at least for a time. The letter read as follows:

"MY DEAR MINNA:

"I am obliged to leave suddenly for New York on very important business. The train by which I go starts in about an hour, and as I have several matters to look after in the city before I go, I will be unable to see you till my return, which I hope will be in a few days. I enclose a check for house expenses in the mean time, and will drop you a line from New York. Selby has kindly consented to deliver this to you for me.

"Your affectionate father,

"RICHARD GREY."

"My father," said Minna as she closed the letter, "has gone very suddenly to New York. I had no idea that he was going away."

"I don't think he had any idea himself till about a couple of hours before he left. I tried to persuade him to put it off till to-morrow."

"Oh! I wish you had succeeded," exclaimed Minna,

then checking herself she added, "of course I always like to see him before he goes anywhere."

"I thought you would, but I know his business is very pressing, and he seemed so bent upon going, that I felt it useless to urge him against his will. I trust, however, he will not be away many days."

Minna had an idea that Selby knew a good deal about her father's affairs, and that she could obtain from him some very correct information regarding Mr. Grey's difficulties; but it was the last thing she thought of to even hint anything of the kind to him. In return for the confidence Selby had reposed in her, she had spoken to him of her own life and how she missed her mother's presence, and how lonely she sometimes felt in the great house with no one but the servants, no female friend in whom she could trust or confide in. She complained that she had been unable to find one congenial spirit amongst all the ladies of her acquaintance. Then Selby would speak of his own mother, and say how much he desired that Minna would become acquainted with her because she was so good, and could, in her own motherly kind way, advise and comfort her. Minna felt she would like to meet Mrs. Selby, but at the same time realized that a barrier existed between her and the gratification of the wish, and that was George Selby himself. So these two went on day by day growing gradually closer to each other in spite of themselves, the one resisting less and less, the other becoming more and more emboldened; but circumstances occurred ere long to bring this strange courtship to a crisis and to give Selby the victory.

Richard Grey did not return to his home for many a day.

CHAPTER XI.

About a week after the events related in the last chapter, Minna received the following letter from her father:

"My dear Minna:

"Circumstances which I did not foresee will oblige me to postpone my return home for some time. An individual who has been the principal cause of my monetary difficulties has gone to San Francisco, and this necessitates my going there to see him. It is now uncertain how long I will be absent from home, and as the cares of looking after the house may prove irksome to you while I am away, I think you had better take rooms in the Lindell for the time being, and close up the establishment. You had better dismiss all the servants except Tim, who can remain in the house and look after its safety. Of course, I do not insist upon your doing this, but I advise it for the best; and in case you decide upon following my suggestion, I enclose a check to enable you to pay off the servants, and for your current expenses until you hear from me again. You had better write to me at San Francisco, as a letter would not reach here in time for me to receive it. I trust you are keeping well, and that everything is going on smoothly at the house. I know you will be very comfortable at the Lindell, and you will meet a number of nice people there; it will be a change for you. Has Mrs. Rolph called during my absence? Write, and give me all the news.

"Your affectionate father,

"Richard Grey."

The same mail that carried the above letter brought two others from Mr. Grey, one of which was addressed to Mrs. Rolph, the other to Selby.

The one to Mrs. Rolph read as follows:

"MY DEAR AMELIA:

"I regret very much having been obliged to leave St. Louis without seeing you, but my departure was as unexpected as it was sudden, and was caused by a scoundrel having absconded with a lot of my money. I am now hunting him up, and may be detained away from home for some time. I start to-morrow for San Francisco, where a letter will find me, and where I hope to receive a line from you. You have frequently spoken to me of the pleasure it would give you to have Minna stay with you. I must acknowledge having treated your kind invitation rather neglectfully, but now that I expect to be away from home for some time, I would take it as a great kindness if you could prevail upon her to pay you a visit. I use the term "prevail upon her" because she dislikes paying lengthy visits in the way I have mentioned, and is rather too independent on that point, in my opinion. I have suggested to her to close up the house and take rooms in the Lindell while I am away, which I hardly expect she will do; so that if you will see her I think she will accept your kind offer. Of course, you will understand that it will be better for you not to let her know that you and I have had any correspondence on this subject. My chief regret in being absent from St. Louis is because I am separated from you, for I really long to see your sweet face once more. I console myself, however, with the idea that while I may be far away from you I am not altogether absent in your thoughts.

"Ever faithfully yours,

"RICHARD GREY."

The following was the letter to Selby:

"My dear Selby:

"Immediately on my arrival here, I went to work to hunt up Langton, and I think I had visited nearly every place in the city where he was likely to be, when I began to despair of finding him. About this time I ran across Bill Brown, who, as you may remember, was rather a chum of Langton's, and who, when I first met him, appeared startled and evidently desirous of avoiding me. I, however, was not to be shaken off, as I felt sure I would be able to get something out of him. I got more than I bargained for. I suppose my manner was so friendly towards him that he concluded to let the cat out of the bag to save himself. He surprised me considerably by saying that he supposed I knew something of how Langton had won my money. I did not understand what the devil he meant, but I merely answered that I knew Langton had acted like a mean cad. 'Well! Grey,' he said, 'I am sorry I had anything to do with it;' and then he told me the whole story of how I had been swindled, and how the affair was discovered by that stranger friend of yours whom you brought to the rooms. Who was that friend of yours? I am under some obligation to him, and would like to know his name. ——, who keeps the rooms was also in the swindle, and I owe him one, which I will pay, depend upon it, on my return. I feel confoundedly small that such a thing should have happened to me. I watched Langton pretty closely, but could never discover any sign of anything wrong, as I have often told you. I felt inclined to take it out of Brown on the spot, but on second thoughts I concluded to use him if possible to catch Langton. It appears the two quarrelled over the spoils when they reached New York, and they split—Brown coming out of the affair minus most of his share, and Langton going to San Francisco with nearly all the plunder. I have not time to tell you the particulars of how the three scoundrels managed to

fleece me, it is sufficient to say I was the victim of as deep laid and villainous a plot as ever was concocted against a man, and that I have been robbed of every cent by that fellow Langton. I considered him bad enough when I thought he had won my money fairly, and had merely sneaked off to avoid giving me satisfaction, but now I will follow him all the world over, if necessary, to be revenged on him. I leave here to-morrow for San Francisco, and Brown has given me some particulars which will, I think, enable me to find Langton. When I do, he will disgorge every cent he plundered from me or I'll know the reason why. As it is now rather uncertain when I may return to St. Louis, I have written my daughter advising her to shut up the house and take rooms in the Lindell. I don't see the necessity for keeping up the expense, when matters are in so precarious a state with me. Look her up, like a good fellow, and see things all right for her. I can trust you if I can trust any man. I will be glad to hear from you in San Francisco.

"Believe me,

"Yours sincerely,

"RICHARD GREY."

When Minna received her letter she made up her mind at once to follow her father's advice, shut up the house and go to the Lindell. This course was quite in accord with her recent views of retrenchment, and, contrary to her father's supposition, she never hesitated a moment in adopting it. She would have preferred some more retired place to live in than a large hotel, but as her father had suggested it, she resolved to follow his directions. She wondered at Mr. Grey's inquiry about Mrs. Rolph, but she did not understand that it was merely inserted in the letter to show that he still desired a continuance of the intimacy between her and the widow ; an intimacy, however, which Minna was

not at all anxious to encourage. Mrs. Rolph had vainly endeavored to create a favorable impression upon Minna, but there was something about the woman which always repelled the innocent girl; and, notwithstanding her evident desire to be friendly, and the high opinion which Mr. Grey seemed to entertain towards her, Minna never could overcome a certain repugnance to her.

When Mrs. Rolph read her letter she at once ordered her carriage and drove direct to the Grey mansion. She was delighted at the prospect of having Minna as a guest, not that she really cared very much for the girl, but she wished to propitiate the daughter as a step towards gaining the father. She was not quite sure how much influence Minna could exert over Mr. Grey if she wished, and thought it wise to remove any obstacle to her ambition in that quarter. Mrs. Rolph's ambition was to become the wife of Mr. Grey, and she entertained the idea that she would succeed; the only fear she felt was regarding Minna, who she imagined might prove a stumbling block in her path. But if she had known the truth, she might have saved herself all the trouble she took with Minna, as Mr. Grey, if it had suited him, would have married Mrs. Rolph without even acquainting his daughter of his intention beforehand, far less consulting her. The widow was very wealthy, and also a very handsome woman; but if she had been poor, her beauty would never have influenced Mr. Grey sufficiently to make him think of marrying her; besides, she had not been as discreet in her conduct as she ought to have been towards the man she contemplated as a husband. Mr. Grey, however, had an eye on her wealth, and although he had not committed himself altogether to an offer of marriage, he had given several hints of a matri-

monial nature to her, which led her to believe that she would become Mrs. Grey at some future day. This was the secret, therefore, of the widow's desire to cultivate a friendship with Minna.

Minna was still thinking over the contents of her father's letter, when Mrs. Rolph was announced, who, coming forward, apologized warmly for not having called sooner.

"If I had only known," she said, "that you were all alone, I would have come to comfort you in your loneliness; but I only learned to-day, for the first time, that Mr. Grey was away from home,—does he purpose being absent any length of time?"

"I hardly know," said Minna, "his business may detain him some time, and he may be able to return soon; it all depends on circumstances."

"Then you will just come and stay with me while he is away. Now do not refuse me, for I have set my heart upon it, and I will make it so pleasant for you—it must be dreadfully lonely here."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Rolph, but really I do not see how I can accept your kind invitation, at least, just at present. I intend to close the house until my father's return, and take rooms at the Lindell; and this will give me so much to look after in seeing everything in order before I go, that I will be kept very busy; but when I am settled in the hotel, I may be able to stay a few days with you. It is very kind of you to ask me."

"Don't mention kindness, my dear, it will be a great pleasure, I assure you. I am very lonely, all by myself, and your visit would be such a delightful break in the monotony—do say you will come, and I will help you

here every day until we get the house in order. Don't go to the hotel at all ; come along with me."

"Thank you, Mrs. Rolph, you are very kind indeed ; but I would prefer going first to the hotel. I would like to feel perfectly free for a few days."

Minna said this in a tone that convinced Mrs. Rolph that there was no use pressing her invitation any further, so she replied, "Well, my dear, I only hope that you will come as soon as you are settled. Can I be of any service to you ?—you know I am very handy,—just tell me if I can assist you in any way."

But Minna declined all offers of assistance, and Mrs. Rolph went away soon afterwards, very much disappointed, and somewhat incensed at Minna's refusal of her proffered hospitality.

When Selby read his letter he felt convinced now that Mr. Grey knew the whole particulars of Langton's treachery,—he would not return until he had used every effort to discover his whereabouts ; and knowing Langton's character for cunning, he saw that Mr. Grey would be detained away for some considerable time. He felt quite concerned about Minna, and pitied the girl in her trying position. He did not like the idea of her going to live at a hotel, and decided upon going at once and stating his views to her on the subject ; at the same time he thought it a good opportunity to induce her to visit his father and mother. He had written home to his mother about Minna, and only that morning he had received a reply, extending a cordial invitation to the young girl to visit them in New York ; so he felt himself fully armed for the occasion.

He therefore lost no time in going to see Minna, and arrived at the house just as Mrs. Rolph was leaving in

her carriage. The widow smiled graciously on him, little dreaming that he was about to upset all her plans.

Selby at once informed Minna that he had received a letter from her father in relation to some business matters, in which had been mentioned the probability of her taking rooms at the Lindell for a time.

"Yes," said Minna, "I have decided to go there, although I would have preferred a place where I could feel more at home. I cannot say that I like the prospect of hotel life, but it is better than staying here all alone."

"Why go there at all?" asked Selby. "You will not be comfortable, because you are unaccustomed to anything of the sort."

"My father desires it, and like a good, obedient daughter," said Minna smiling, "I am following his instructions."

"I have so often asked you to pay my mother a visit in New York that I am almost afraid to mention the subject again, but I think if I could induce you to go it would be just the thing."

"I ought certainly to consider myself a highly honored personage," answered Minna, "for here I have received two invitations within an hour from people to go and stay with them."

"I suppose," remarked Selby, "that Mrs. Rolph has been offering her hospitality, because I met her driving away from here."

"Yes," replied Minna, "Mrs. Rolph tendered me a very pressing invitation to visit her, and I gave her a sort of half promise to go there after I became settled at the Lindell."

"I would be very sorry to see you go there," said Selby seriously.

"And why, pray?" asked Minna.

Selby was rather put out by this blunt rejoinder, but he answered, "I can hardly tell why, only Mrs. Rolph does not seem to me a suitable companion for you. It would be better, Miss Grey, if you did not class her among your intimate friends."

"And pray, Mr. Selby, when did you install yourself as the custodian of my acts? Are you aware that Mrs. Rolph is regarded by my father as a very estimable lady, and that he particularly desires me to cultivate her friendship. Now, who am I to obey; you or my father, I would like to know?"

"Pardon me," said Selby; "I assure you I did not mean to offend you. Probably Mr. Grey does not know Mrs. Rolph as well as I do. I have been acquainted with her for a number of years before even she came to live in St. Louis, and I persist in saying that I do not consider her a fit companion for you."

"I am sorry to hear you speaking ill of a lady; I did not expect it from you. I feel inclined to become the championess of Mrs. Rolph."

"I see no necessity. I am not going to wage war against the lady. I have merely stated my honest opinion of her, so far as you are concerned, and believe me, I only did so from the deep regard I feel towards you. I would give the same advice to a sister, if I had one."

"Is she then such a dreadful creature?"

"I have nothing to say against Mrs. Rolph except what I have already stated, that I do not consider her a suitable friend for you. Do not imagine, Miss Grey, because I have said this that I am fond of retailing gossip, or that I am given to traducing people, especially ladies. I assure you I despise anything of the sort. I

feel for you a very sincere friendship. I am also a friend of your father, and as such, I merely gave my opinion in regard to one who evidently wishes to become an intimate acquaintance of yours. I have nothing to say against Mrs. Rolph. Please let us drop the subject."

"Very well," said Minna; "but before doing so I will relieve your anxiety about me by saying that there is no danger of my becoming very friendly with Mrs. Rolph; we are not suited for each other,—there now, are you satisfied?"

"I am very glad to hear you say so, indeed," replied Selby warmly; "but now that we have disposed of that question let me ask you another, will you pay us a visit in New York?—Here," he said, pulling out a letter from his pocket, "I have my mother's own invitation to you," and then he read it to her from beginning to end—a letter so full of tender, loving words, so motherly and kind, and so full of good advice to her only son, of whom apparently she was very proud, that Minna could not refrain from shedding tears, as she thought of her own dead mother, whom she missed sadly every day of her life. The letter had the effect of creating a desire in the heart of Minna to see old Mrs. Selby; for while she had listened to other letters from that lady, none had ever touched her feelings so keenly as the one that had just been read to her. George Selby, moreover, gained a point in Minna's favor through reading that letter, as the young girl reasoned within herself, that with such a mother, the son could not be a very bad man. But she was not aware how long that son had been away from the good influence of his mother, and how easily he had been led astray by evil associates. When Selby had finished reading, he said to Minna,

"Now, Miss Grey, will you not go and see my mother, when she is so desirous of meeting you. You need not feel at all anxious about the safety of the house, as Tim is a very careful and faithful lad, and, besides, I will be here to look after everything for you."

The fact that Selby did not intend to be a visitor at his mother's house at the same time as herself, decided Minna to go, but she said.

"Well, Mr. Selby, I think I would like to go; but I fear my father might be annoyed at my leaving St. Louis in his absence."

"If that is your only objection you may set your mind at rest and decide to go, because I will answer for Mr. Grey being perfectly satisfied. I assure you, Miss Grey, if I thought he would be displeased I would not press you."

"I do not suppose he will be very angry," said Minna, smiling, "and as you promise to look after Tim and the house for me when I am away, I will accept your mother's invitation. But how am I to go? I never travelled alone in my life."

"I was going to offer to accompany you as far as New York."

"Oh!" exclaimed Minna, "that would never do—people would say at once that we had eloped in my father's absence. Oh! no, we must find some other way."

Selby looked rather disappointed, but he thought it prudent to conceal it, and so he answered at once, that he could arrange everything for her so that she would have no difficulty on the way, and his father and mother would meet her at the station in New York. "It is proverbial," he said, "that ladies can travel alone on our railways with perfect safety, and every care and atten-

tion are paid to them by the conductors, who, as a rule, are more gentlemanly in that respect than many who move in a higher sphere of life and claim to be gentlemen."

"There is one more thing, however," said Minna—"what will I do about Mrs. Rolph?"

"Why," replied Selby, "you can say, with perfect truth, that you have decided to accept a prior invitation from the Selbys, in New York."

To this Minna agreed, and so it was arranged at last that she would go and visit the Selbys, which she did a couple of days afterwards.

Selby then scored one more point in his own favor. He had cherished a desire for some time that Minna would visit his home, because he hoped that, through his mother's influence, he might be able to soften the young girl's feelings towards himself, and he calculated well, as will be seen ere long.

CHAPTER XII.

A FEW days after Minna's departure, George Selby happened to meet Mrs. Rolph, who said to him :

"And so you have run away with the fair daughter of our friend Grey ; you are a dreadfully captivating man, Selby, with the ladies, as I know from experience," she added, looking up and smiling in his face.

Selby was evidently not over pleased at the latter portion of her remark, but he answered quite pleasantly, "You are mistaken, Mrs. Rolph, I could not have carried off Miss Grey when I am here, and have not been absent from the city for some time; she went away of her own free will. "My mother's invitation was, I think, a prior one to yours, and, therefore, entitled to first consideration."

"Prior invitation!—the very words Miss Grey used when she declined mine with thanks ; and so, Selby, you were aware that I wished the young lady to come and stay with me. I do believe you dictated the very note she sent me."

"Hardly," answered Selby.

"Do you know," said Mrs. Rolph, "that you have been the cause of a great disappointment to me."

"I am very sorry if I have been, but you know this is a selfish world."

"I know it is," replied Mrs. Rolph, "but I fear there

has been more than selfishness in your case. I rather think there has been design."

"I do not see why you should imagine so."

"Are you quite sure that the exemplary George Selby is not anxious to prevent a certain young lady, on whom he has set his affections, from becoming too intimate with another lady whom he used to regard with great favor once upon a time? Are you quite sure of this?"

"You have no right, Mrs. Rolph, to suppose anything of the kind. Miss Grey is her own mistress, and quite able to choose her friends, without my interference."

"Very true," said the widow, "but there is such a thing as influence, you may have used yours in that direction against me."

"I have no influence in that quarter, Mrs. Rolph, as you suspect."

"There, Selby, don't tell fibs, you can't do so successfully with that expressive face of yours. Pray, if you have no influence there, how did you manage to induce Miss Grey to go to New York, after she had promised to visit me? Now, sir, don't tell any more fibs; you cannot contend against a woman's wit. I see the whole thing clearly—George Selby is looking after a wife, and he is afraid that if she becomes intimate with me, I may refer to a little episode which occurred during his bachelor career."

"Mrs. Rolph, you are altogether astray. I am not afraid that you will tell anything about that affair; and, in addition, I may inform you that Miss Grey is not likely to become my wife."

"Another fib, Selby; when will you stop? I know as well as you do, that you are laying your plans to catch

the lovely Miss Grey; and allow me to tell you more, which will please you, you are very likely to succeed."

"I do not deny that I would be a very happy man, indeed, if I thought that your prediction would be fulfilled; but I fear you are a false prophetess, Mrs. Rolph."

"Not I, I know you too well, and I also know your great cunning in such matters. You forget I have had some experience of it."

"I don't see why you persist in referring to what is long past, forgotten, or, rather, it ought to be."

"And why ought it to be forgotten? does a woman forget such things easily? But come, we will say no more about it, we know each other sufficiently well, to speak plainly. You have set your heart on winning Miss Grey, and, you are well aware, I have set mine on winning her father. Now let us make a truce. You have stepped between me and my object by preventing Miss Grey from coming to stay with me. I wish to cultivate the daughter—will you promise not to interfere again?"

"I will promise nothing," said Selby, "because it is not in my power to interfere, even if I wished to do so. I cannot tell what has put this idea into your head; besides, I do not see what Miss Grey has to do with your intentions regarding her father. If you think I am going to interfere between you and Grey, you are very much mistaken. Grey can attend to his own business, without any assistance from me."

"Well," said Mrs. Rolph bitterly, "you will not understand me, because you do not wish to; but, mark me, it will be better for you to be friends with me—I am a good hater."

"I suppose you will interfere with me," said Selby,

laughing. "I have no wish that we should be enemies; let us part good friends," he added, stopping and holding out his hand.

Mrs. Rolph held out her hand. "Selby," she said, "you are a greater simpleton than I took you to be—good-by."

"I am sorry that I have fallen in your estimation," replied Selby, as he lifted his hat,—"good-by."

"Ah! my fine fellow," thought Mrs. Rolph, as she walked away, "you will have cause to repent having set me at defiance—you cannot deceive me—you have put the girl against me, else she would have come to me first and gone to the Selbys afterwards. I know now George Selby that you are against me, and will do your utmost to prevent my marriage with Grey, because, forsooth, you would not like me in the family,—but to be forewarned is to be forearmed. You have undertaken a difficult task in opposing me, and you have made a bitter enemy where you might have had a good and useful friend."

George Selby, now that he was aware of the widow's intentions, felt rather pleased at having been the means of preventing Minna from becoming a tool in her hands. He had known for some time that Mrs. Rolph was endeavoring to capture Mr. Grey, but he never had any idea that she would be successful. He gave Mr. Grey more credit for good sense than to suppose him capable of taking such a wife to live in the same house with his daughter. Selby knew the lady to be possessed of a bad heart, and while he acknowledged her as a clever and fascinating woman, he at the same time looked upon her as a dangerous companion for any young girl. Yet Mrs. Rolph was looked upon with favor by some of the best

families in St. Louis. She was wealthy, handsome and accomplished ; was that not sufficient for them ? Her true character was known only to a few, amongst whom, however, were George Selby and Richard Grey, and for that reason the former never entertained the thought that the latter would make her his wife.

Could George Selby have foreseen the pain and misery he was laying in store for himself and Minna by his opposition to Mrs. Rolph, it is doubtful whether he would not have temporized with her and sought to conciliate her. But he could not see into the future, and, therefore, he did not trouble himself very much about the matter, since he had Minna safe and sound under his mother's influence and protection.

As the widow continued her promenade, she was joined by a gentleman who figures somewhat prominently hereafter in these pages, and who was a very intimate friend of hers. His name was Rufus Holt, and he was one of those drones in society who seldom do any practical good, and who very frequently do a great deal of harm. How he managed to live was a mystery to most of his acquaintances, for he had neither profession nor business of any kind to employ his time or to supply his wants, yet he was seldom without money. It is true he was known to be heavily in debt, but he always managed to pay when asked to do so ; in fact, he was a practised borrower from his friends, and always took care to arrange matters so that he could get money from one quarter when he expected to be called upon to pay up in another. It was a system of robbing Peter to pay Paul which he adopted ; but, if it had not been for the assistance of a few of his more intimate friends, he could not have carried on this game very long. Mrs.

Rolph had frequently been of service to him in this way, and had never asked him to repay the money which she gave him; so that Rufus Holt was deeply indebted to the widow, and in return made himself useful to her in many ways that a more honorable man would have scorned. Through the instrumentality of Mrs. Rolph and a few others, Rufus Holt had the entrée to good society. He dressed well, sang and played admirably, and was full of wit and humor. He was, therefore, deemed a pleasant companion, and as he was ever willing to oblige the ladies and do their bidding, he was a general favorite with them. He was handsome, and in outward appearance had a dashing, careless, off-hand manner, which prepossessed many in his favor. With the men he was regarded as a good sort of fellow, not fit for much outside of gallanting with the fair sex, but he was not despised, as he would have been if his true character had been known. Rufus Holt inwardly was the meanest type of a scoundrel. He had not the slightest feeling of honor or pride in his composition. He could do the most despicable act without any sense of shame, and he could receive an insult with perfect composure, if he thought he could gain anything by so doing. He could fawn and cringe and accept favors without the least compunction, and was a most accomplished sponge; because, while he sponged, he managed to retain a character for respectability outwardly. To a woman of Mrs. Rolph's stamp he was a useful tool in many ways, and to such as her he was indebted for being able to keep his head above water. There was one trait in his character, however, which had nearly brought him into serious difficulty on more than one occasion; he was a thorough libertine, so much so, that a number of respect-

able ladies deemed it advisable to cut his acquaintance altogether; but, unfortunately, while they did so, they neglected, from feelings of delicacy, to make known his true character.

Strange to say, George Selby was one of Rufus Holt's most intimate friends ; and the only way this can be accounted for, is that the former, having a great deal of time on his hands, and being fond of pleasure, found the latter so pleasant a companion that he cultivated his acquaintance for his sociable qualities. Moreover, as we already know, Selby was very liberal in money matters, and Holt found it very convenient at times to possess his friendship.

When the gentleman whom we have been describing joined Mrs. Rolph, she said to him, "Do you know, Holt, that your friend Selby has lost his heart to Miss Grey ?"

"What !" he exclaimed, "that little bit of womankind whom you took charge of for Grey, when he brought her out ?"

"The same," said Mrs. Rolph ; "but I thought you were rather smitten in that direction. I remember you were loud in your praises of her at the time."

"Well, I certainly was; but I became cured almost immediately. At the ball I thought her a delightful little creature ; but when I called afterwards, I found her so deucedly cold that I gave her up and have not met her since."

"You ought to have persevered, Holt, she improves on acquaintance ; but now Selby has cut you out, I fear, without any hope for you."

"Lucky fellow, that Selby," said Holt ; "but it is always the same with me. The ladies all like me very

well so long as I keep within a certain point, but the moment I become tender or loving, then they grow as cool as cucumbers. Ah! I will never get married, I see it plainly; and to tell you the truth, Amelia, I am not sorry for it. The care of a matrimonial life must be simply tremendous."

Mrs. Rolph laughed. "Come now, Holt," she said, "if your wife had a good round sum in the bank, and was pretty and amiable, wouldn't it make a difference?"

"It might, certainly," was the reply, "if I had control of the check-book—not otherwise."

"Oh!" said the widow, "that would not be necessary; you could always borrow from your wife instead of from other people, and you would not be obliged to repay her."

Rufus Holt merely laughed at this hit, and replied: "By jingo! that is a fact; it would be very convenient. Will Miss Grey have money?"

"Plenty of it," said Mrs. Rolph. "Now why don't you take a hint? there is yet a chance for you, and you are more likely to succeed than Selby—I am sure of it. Come, now, I would like to see you settled."

"Ah! Amelia, this is unkind of you; you want to get rid of me, I see. But I thought Selby was a great friend of yours?"

"I have not the same interest in him that I have in you; besides, he is well enough off, and does not require to marry a rich wife as you do."

"This is very kind of you, Amelia; but, hang me if I care very much about it. I am very comfortable as I am, and it will be a great bother. I think you had better let Selby have a clear course."

But Mrs. Rolph was not satisfied to do so, and there-

fore she laid down the law to her companion, and told him plainly that she wished him to pay his attentions to Minna, and endeavor to supplant Selby, and threatened him with her dire displeasure if he refused to do so. She counselled him to remain on good terms with Selby, and to use him, if necessary, to bring about the desired result. She reasoned that if Holt appeared as a friend of Selby, he would have a better opportunity of ingratiating himself with Minna, and in this she showed her woman's tact.

Rufus Holt, when he saw how inflexible Mrs. Rolph was, agreed to follow out her wishes, and the widow, having lost no time in setting the machinery at work to injure Selby, allowed her thoughts to flow into the future and devise fresh schemes, in case the one she had in hand should fail. She determined to use Rufus Holt to the end, and if he did not succeed in winning Minna from Selby she resolved to take some other course to gratify her revenge. For this reason she resolved to take every precaution to prevent a rupture between Selby and Holt, and instructed the latter to be careful not to jeopardize his friendship with the former, unless he felt perfectly sure of success with Minna Grey.

George Selby had indeed aroused the hatred of an unscrupulous woman, cruel as she was clever in her designs, and who was destined to make him feel the full weight of her malice.

Rufus Holt had no compunction in becoming the willing tool of the woman by his side, although he was under heavy obligations to Selby, and professed to be his friend; his only dread was, that in carrying out the schemes of Mrs. Rolph, he might become the victim of a justly incensed rival; but he resolved to act with pru-

dence. Thus the plot was concocted which was to bring misery and sorrow on two innocent heads; and Mrs. Rolph parted from her confederate with mingled feelings of delight at the prospect of being revenged on Selby, and contempt for the willing tool, Holt, who had played so easily into her hands.

CHAPTER XIII.

MINNA'S visit to New York extended from days into weeks, and from weeks into months; and yet she was unable to tear herself away from the kind old people, who had become so warmly attached to her that they would not hear of her returning to St. Louis, so long as her father remained absent from home. It seemed to the young girl like a new life to her, so different altogether from her lonely existence in the great house at home, that she almost dreaded the day, when she would be obliged to return. Selby had only paid one visit to his parents during Minna's sojourn there; but he had learned sufficient on that occasion from his mother to know that his cause was safe enough in her hands, and that it would be better for him to leave it altogether with her.

"She is a dear, sweet girl, George," his mother had said to him, "and if I can be the means of bringing about a union between you and her, I will consider that I have done my duty as a mother to my boy, whom I wish to see happily married ere I am taken away."

Minna had received a letter from her father, in which he stated his satisfaction at her having gone to visit the Selbys, and also that his own stay in San Francisco might be prolonged into months; so that there was no pressing necessity for her return to St. Louis, so long as

she was happy where she was, and the Selbys were desirous of keeping her.

George Selby had also received a letter from Mr. Grey, in which he said, that up to the time of writing he had been unable to come across Langton, but that he had been very successful in play since his arrival in San Francisco. He spoke of some mining speculations which he contemplated, and hinted that probably he might decide to take up his abode altogether in California. He also informed Selby that he had received a letter from Mrs. Rolph, complaining that Minna had refused her invitation to stay with her, and had gone to New York instead; "but," added Mr. Grey, "I am very glad that my daughter is with your people; but look out for the widow, as for some reason she is rather hostile towards you."

Selby smiled as he read the latter portion of the letter, but as he could not see how Mrs. Rolph could do him any injury, he dismissed the subject from his mind.

Later news from California, however, from friends in San Francisco with whom Selby corresponded, showed that Mr. Grey had been unfortunate in his mining speculations, and had taken somewhat to dissipation. In fact, they wrote, that he was beginning to drink very hard, and for a time no letters from her father reached either Minna or George Selby.

It was about this time that certain occurrences took place at the Grey mansion, in which Tim bore a prominent part, and which will go to show the degradation to which Mr. Grey was brought through his reverses.

Tim, who found his duties rather onerous in having the charge of the whole establishment on his shoulders,

at the same time felt very lonesome in having no one to speak to, and no fellow-servants to gossip with. He being a faithful lad, did not care about inviting any of his friends to visit him at the house while it was closed up; neither did he consider it right for him to be absent for any length of time from the premises during the day, But in the evening, after he had carefully examined that everything was all right, he was accustomed to repair, for an hour or so, to an adjoining lager beer saloon, where he enjoyed his favorite beverage while he chatted and smoked with a few chosen friends. This was the only recreation Tim allowed himself during the time he remained in sole charge of the Grey mansion, and therefore he was very regular in his attendance at the saloon, and looked forward every day with pleasure to the evening's enjoyment. He cooked his own meals and attended to his wants himself, so that he had no necessity for any visitors at the house, although occasionally one of the old servants would step in to see how he was getting along.

One evening after supper, and just as he was closing up preparatory to his usual visit to the saloon, he happened to rest awhile, leaning lazily against the railing which separated the garden from the street, when a Jewish looking individual sauntered up and addressed him:

"Fine property this," said the man.

"Well, yes," answered Tim, taking his pipe from his mouth, "a very neat sort of place; if I was only a family man I would be very comfortable here; but it is rather large for me."

"Are you the owner then?" asked the man, apparently surprised at Tim's words.

"I am the present occupant," said Tim, "I am lord

of all I survey; anything else you would like to know?"

"I vould like to zee ze garden; I am very vond of flowers; vould you let me come in?"

"I never receive visitors. I am of a very retired disposition," answered Tim, loftily; "but don't mind handing you a sunflower across the fence."

"I don't zee any zunflowers," said the man.

"Oh! they grow in the conservatory," said Tim; "but perhaps you don't hanker after sunflowers."

The man looked at Tim for a moment, hardly knowing whether to be angry or not. "You are poking fun at me," he said, "I vill vish you a good-day."

"Good-day," replied Tim. "Call again another day, I will be happy to see you—outside the fence," and he turned away to finish his evening duties.

"By gar," thought the man, as he walked away, "zat is a rum chap; but I must get into ze house someway."

Tim thought no more of his interview, but went on with his work, and when he had finished, repaired, as usual, to his favorite rendezvous, where he was soon in the midst of a pleasant game of cards with some of his cronies.

So interested was he in the society of his friends, that he did not observe the entrance of the man who had spoken to him at the house; but during a lull in the conversation and hilarity, he caught sight of him sitting by himself in a corner, and evidently watching what was going on with great attention.

Tim, immediately on recognizing him, shouted to him to come forward and have a glass of beer. "I was rather stiff with you up yonder, but here it is different.

We are all hail-fellows well met, you know, in this place; so come and have a glass of beer."

The man at once arose and accepted Tim's hospitality, saying as he did so, "I chust come to Zaint Louis to-day, and vas walking round ven I zee your very vine place."

"Well, you see, I never have visitors up there," said Tim; "but I am happy to meet you here; so join in. Boys, let me introduce you to—to—eh! What's your name?"

"Solomon John, at your service," said the man.

"What'll you have, Solomon? you can order anything from a Catawba cobbler to plain lager, here; and have it served in style." The man chose the latter beverage, and at once made himself at home with those present—Tim in particular.

When the latter rose to go home, he found that he had taken a little more drink than he was accustomed to, and felt somewhat unsteady in his legs. Solomon John accompanied him to the gate of the Grey mansion, but Tim was sober enough to decline his proposition, to see him safely to bed. "I am all right now," said Tim, "and, besides, how the devil could you lock the door when you went away? you'd have to lock me in. No, thank ye, I can take care of myself; good-night," and he closed the door, rather abruptly, in Solomon John's face.

The latter, however, did not leave immediately; but prowled around the premises, examining everything carefully, and taking notes for some purpose. When he had completed his investigation, he appeared to be satisfied with the result. "'Twont be hard," he thought, "it ain't going to be a hard job; but I vill vait for Isaac.

'Twont do for me to tackle zat young deevil zat shut ze door in my face; he's a pesky hard un to handle, I do think.—I'll vait for Isaac." He then walked away, and just as he was turning the corner which would shut the Grey mansion from his view, he stopped, and looking back, muttered, "Vy, vat a vine bonfire zat place vill make, to be sure." A policeman coming up just at that time, Solomon John thought it wise to move off at once, which he did.

The next morning Tim felt somewhat ashamed of himself, and as the events of the previous evening occurred to his mind, he bethought himself of his new acquaintance Solomon John. He had a dim recollection of that individual's second attempt to gain admission to the house, and this set him wondering what object the man could have in view. He then remembered that Solomon John had been the means of making him drunk, and this fact aroused his suspicion to such a degree, that he decided to watch, and be more careful in the future. He resolved to go to the saloon that evening, as if nothing had happened out of his ordinary course; although he felt that getting drunk and going home with a stranger was something he had reason to be ashamed of before his friends. He, however, put a bold face on, and made his appearance at the regular hour in the saloon, where he had to stand an unmerciful chaffing, but which he took good-humoredly, as he knew he deserved it.

Solomon John came in soon afterwards, and Tim, being now on his guard, kept a watchful eye on him. The new-comer evidently wished to make himself particularly gracious to our old friend Tim, and was most lavish in his offers to treat and make himself generally

agreeable. Tim now felt sure that Solomon had some design in what he was doing, and, being a shrewd young man, he resolved, if possible, to fathom the mystery. To gain this end, therefore, he appeared to accept the hospitality offered him, and pretended to drink heavily of brandy; he certainly was obliged to swallow a good deal, but not sufficient to dull his senses, as he cleverly managed to spill more than he drank; and in a short time he gave signs that he was in a thorough state of intoxication. He became very demonstrative towards Solomon John, and expressed his sorrow to that individual for having treated him as he had done. He confided to him the fact that he lived all alone at the house, having been left in charge of it by his master, and that he would be very happy to show him over the place. Solomon's eye gleamed with pleasure, when Tim, in his half-drunken way, offered to admit him to the Grey mansion, and the cute lad did not fail to observe it. He was more determined than ever to discover the intentions of his new-found friend, and frustrate them if necessary. Tim now pretended to get hopelessly intoxicated, and reeled about in such a way that Solomon John thought it time to take him home. Several of Tim's friends, however, interfered and insisted upon going with him themselves; but he, to their surprise, refused their offers, and would not stir unless Solomon accompanied him. When Tim left the saloon with his companion, the night not being very dark, he observed that they were being followed by another man, who, however, kept at some distance from them, but whose movements were very much like those of a confederate, which made our hero doubly careful to guard against a surprise.

Little did Solomon John imagine that the man who

reeled by his side, clutching his arm for support, had his other hand firmly grasped on a revolver, ready to use it at a moment's notice. Yet such was the case. Tim rarely took chances without being fully prepared for any emergency, and in this case, had there been the least sign of foul play on the part of Solomon, he would have shot that individual through the heart without a moment's hesitation.

Tim was now anxious to learn something about the man who was following them, and for that reason he thought he would afford him an opportunity to overtake them. He therefore appeared to get very drunk indeed, and became utterly unmanageable. He lost the use of his legs altogether, and sank down in a heap at the feet of Solomon John, who tried to lift him, but found him so limp and helpless, that he dropped him in disgust. "By gar!" he exclaimed, looking down at Tim, who seemed to have fallen sound asleep, "you are a nice von to be left in charge of ze house. I don't tink ve vill have zo much trouble as I thought."

In the mean time the man who had been following them came up.

"Vell, Isaac," said Solomon to him, "here's a go. I got him so drunk he can't stand up. Vat vill we do?"

"Feel his pockets," replied Isaac, "and get the key—that's all we want."

"Vy! yes! to be sure," said Solomon, and he stooped down to put the plan into operation; but just at that moment Tim seemed to revive, and in a spasmodic effort to gain his legs sent the top of his head in contact with Solomon's nose with such force that it obliged that individual to take a seat in the mud.

Isaac was so bewildered at the suddenness of the

whole proceeding that he never tried to stop Tim, who staggered away a few steps where a convenient corner of the street allowed him to pass suddenly from view, when he took to his heels and ran home as fast as his legs could carry him. In the mean time Solomon sat in the mud, moaning and holding his hands to his nose, which was bleeding profusely.

Tim had learned sufficient to satisfy him that the two men were in league for some purpose, and that their designs, whatever they might be, were directed against his master's house.

Solomon John, as soon as he recovered his speech, began to abuse Isaac roundly for having let Tim escape.

"By gar!" he concluded, "look at my nose, it ish bigger zan my head, I do tink; it ish so big I can hold it in my two hands. Oh, Lor'!"

"You better get up, you old fool," said Isaac; "you've sat there long enough whining about your nose; the next thing, the police will be after us."

He then assisted Solomon to rise, who, holding his handkerchief to his bleeding nose, accompanied Isaac, who could not keep from laughing at the absurdity of the whole affair.

It may be mentioned here that Tim was a perfect mimic, and could take off the character of a drunken man to perfection. He was also very quick in his movements, so that he succeeded where many others would have failed in successfully hoodwinking even his intimate cronies at the saloon about his apparent drunkenness. The accident to Solomon's nose happened close to a corner, which gave Tim the opportunity to escape which he desired. Had it not been for this he could not have got away without discovering his feigned inebriety.

CHAPTER XIV.

TIM was now puzzled to know how to act, but after mature consideration he decided to continue his visits to the saloon as if nothing had happened. He reasoned that Solomon John would seek another interview with him, because he evidently wished, if possible, to gain admission to the Grey mansion through his instrumentality without the necessity of breaking into it, else he would not have been so particular about forming his acquaintance. He had some sort of an idea that it was not a mere robbery the two men contemplated, but what it was he could not imagine. He was, however, more careful than ever in seeing the doors and windows properly locked and fastened before leaving the house, and took every precaution to see everything perfectly safe.

Solomon John, however, did not put in an appearance for several nights at the saloon, and Tim began to think that he must really have broken his nose, or else there were some fresh schemes being concocted by the two men to keep him away. On the fourth evening, however, Solomon walked into the saloon and at once addressed Tim in a friendly manner, who returned his greeting in the same spirit. The two had just begun to hobnob and drink together when the door opened and Isaac appeared on the scene. Solomon at once introduced his confederate to Tim, and the three became very

sociable together. But Tim had resolved to change his tactics, and now he refrained from appearing to get drunk, and taking advantage of an opportunity during some boisterous hilarity amongst the frequenters of the place, he managed to slip away unobserved. The night was pitch dark, and Tim determined to watch outside until Solomon and Isaac left the house, and then follow them, to discover, if possible, their plans. He had not long to wait, for no sooner did Solomon discover that Tim had disappeared than he and Isaac rose and left the saloon. As they walked away Tim followed them, and was surprised to find that they did not take the direction of the Grey mansion. Evidently they had abandoned any attempt that night; but he made up his mind to continue his surveillance of their actions, hoping to overhear something which would give him a clue to their intentions. He was, however, doomed to disappointment on that occasion, as he could not get within hearing distance without being observed by them; but he was partially rewarded for his pains by discovering that they entered a low hotel, the proprietor of which he was well acquainted with. As soon as he made this discovery, and had waited long enough to be certain that they boarded there, Tim retraced his steps and went home, fully resolved on a course of action for the morrow.

Early the next day Tim left the Grey mansion and paid a visit to the proprietor of the lager beer saloon, where he usually spent his evenings, and asked him to bring the landlord of the Anchor hotel (where Solomon and Isaac boarded), as he had something particular to tell him. Tim gave as a reason for not going himself, that there were two men staying at the Anchor whom he did not wish to meet, but he did not mention their

names. The proprietor of the lager beer saloon at once agreed to go as Tim was one of his favorite customers, and immediately set forth on his errand. The landlord of the Anchor happening to be at home, did not delay a moment in coming to meet Tim, who, on his arrival, drew him into a private room, and having ordered drinks shut the door and opened business without delay.

He told the landlord that he had reason to suspect two of his boarders of being up to some game, which, if discovered by the police, would get his house into bad repute, and himself into serious trouble. He appealed to the fact of his having always been his friend, and asked him whether he would assist in ferreting out the plot, and promised at the same time to protect him from any suspicion of being implicated in it. Tim did not make known any of the particulars, but shrouded the whole affair with as much mystery as possible, in order to excite curiosity and also arouse his fears; and he succeeded beyond his expectations. The landlord at once agreed to render him any assistance in his power, and asked how he could help him. Tim then gave the names of the men he suspected, and inquired whether they occupied the same room or had separate apartments.

The landlord replied that they were the queerest boarders he had, and that they slept in the same room, which was one in the attic near the head of the stairs. Tim then asked whether there was any way of stowing him in an adjoining room or closet, where he could overhear any conversation that passed between them, without danger of his being discovered. He was answered in the affirmative, that there would be no difficulty in that, as next to their room there was a sort of lumber

loft with only a thin partition separating it from Solomon and Isaac's room. This was just what Tim wanted, and so he arranged that if he came to the Anchor that night, he was to be shown the loft and the spot where he could listen to what was being said by the suspected men.

Having completed this portion of his plans, Tim went home, feeling quite sure that the landlord of the Anchor would keep faith with him in order to save himself from getting into any difficulty.

That night our hero made his way to the vicinity of the Anchor hotel, which he kept in view until he perceived Solomon and Isaac leave it. He then followed the pair until they entered the lager beer saloon, but he did not join them. He waited patiently until he saw them come out, and as soon as he had ascertained that they did not intend to visit the Grey mansion, but were taking the direction of the Anchor, he ran ahead and was safely stowed in the loft ere they entered their room.

Tim felt sure that his absence from the lager beer saloon would occasion some remarks between the two men, which would likely give him a clue to their intentions; and he was not mistaken, nor was he kept long in suspense.

"Say, Solomon," remarked Isaac, as he proceeded to undress himself, "now that we can talk without anybody hearing us, for I guess we're safe enough here, I'd like to know why you keep fooling around with the boy; he didn't show up to-night; let's make short work of him, and have done with the job. I ain't going to fool much longer, I tell you."

"By gar!" said Solomon, "you vant to spoil the whole ting."

They spoke in a low tone, but Tim, who was listening intently, could hear every word.

"You zee," continued Solomon, "it ain't in ze bargain to make short vork of him; we got to use him."

"What have you to show for your bargain, Solomon, I'd like to know?" said Isaac, moodily.

"Oh! zat is all right 'tween Mister Grey and me. You ze, he vants people to tink zat ze fire vas an accident; zat ze boy got drunk and zet it on fire, you know, and zen ze insurance vill pe paid."

"What the devil matter does it make, as long as the place is burned down, anyway?"

"Oh! you talk zo vary easy, Isaac; but zat boy is the devil, and vould raise a row, I tell you."

"Then we'll quiet him first. Confound the business, are we going to be all year about it?" growled Isaac.

"Ven Mister Grey, he spoke to me, he said, 'Solomon, here is five hundred tollar, an' if you come pack vit the house all purned town, I give you tousand tollar more.' You zee ze place is mortgaged, an' he can't pay, so he purn it town an' get insurance, vich vill be petter to him zan nothing. If ze poy vould find us out ve vould have a hard time, Isaac. Oh! no, we must get him drunk, and zen ve vill do ze job."

"And when are you going to do it?"

"Vell, to-morrow night," said Solomon, "provided ze poy gets drunk, vich I tink he vill, and I keep my nose out of his vay."

Isaac laughed heartily at the thought of Solomon's nose, and then turning over, he said, "Well, Solomon, let us go to sleep, but I want this thing over pretty soon, and I want my share of the money to-morrow, too."

"Oh! you vill get your share; Mister Grey is not ze man to preak his vord."

"And have you only got his word," said Isaac; "I thought you had something stronger than that, some paper to show."

"Mister Grey is not von fool," answered Solomon, "to let papers go about vitch might get him into trooble. Oh! no, he very smart man is Mister Grey; but he vill not preak his vord to Solomon."

"Well it is all the same to me," said Isaac; "but I've got to have the two hundred dollars you promised me before I go any further, so you must plank up to-morrow, Solomon, and then you can settle with Mr. Grey as you d—n please."

Tim had heard sufficient. He saw the whole thing at a glance. He knew now why the house had been shut up and his young mistress induced to leave it. His master, finding that he could not release the mortgage, had resolved rather than sacrifice the property by a forced sale to burn it down, and recover the heavy insurance which he had upon it, and for that purpose he had employed the two scoundrels in the next room. The faithful lad was sorely grieved to hear of this villany on the part of Mr. Grey, and wondered how he could ever have fallen so low. He was determined that he would not quietly allow himself to be made use of, but would frustrate the plot if possible, and thus save his master from ruin a second time. So he quietly made his way out of his hiding-place, feeling almost stunned at what he had overheard; and warning the landlord not to mention his name in any way to Solomon and Isaac, went home to ruminate over the events of the night, and form his plans for the morrow.

Tim, after thinking well over the matter, concluded to allow no one into his secret, but to work alone in his peculiar way. He decided to go to the saloon the next night and meet Solomon and Isaac, with whom he would seem to be friendlier than ever, and in whose company he would appear to become so drunk that they would seek to carry out their design. He also decided to allow the two villains to accompany him home, and to invite them to enter the house with him; but he had his preparations for their reception so arranged that he did not fear their being able to overpower him and accomplish their evil purpose. As we have already shown, Tim was very much attached to his master and young mistress. He had been brought up almost from a child in the employment of Mr. Grey, and had received so many proofs of confidence reposed in him that he almost regarded himself as one of the family, and therefore bound to protect its honor and good name. He saw plainly that misfortune had caused Mr. Grey to sink very low, when he could resort to such a vile scheme as the one which Solomon had been engaged to execute. He also realized that no matter whether the two villains succeeded or failed in their design, the truth would be likely to creep out sooner or later, and suspicion attach itself to his master; and what troubled Tim more than anything else was that the odium resting on the father's name would be sure to injure the daughter. Tim could not bear to think of this, and he resolved to silence the tongues of the two scoundrels if possible. At one time he even contemplated their death as the only sure way of preventing them from disclosing Mr. Grey's complicity in their scheme, but his better nature prevailed, and he decided to adopt some other means less violent. He

was pleased to hear that his master had not committed anything to writing, as any such document in possession of either Solomon or Isaac might have revealed Mr. Grey's share in the proposed crime of arson.

All the next day Tim wandered about the house and grounds like one in a dream. He felt very much disturbed, when thinking over late events, and the dreadful secret concerning Mr. Grey which had come to his knowledge. He thought of every plan to silence the two scoundrels without taking their lives, and at one time conceived the idea of hiring a couple of men to thrash them so soundly that they would leave the vicinity of St. Louis altogether, but he abandoned this project, because he saw that it would be dangerous to take any one into his confidence. He felt very much at a loss to know how to proceed. At one moment, when he thought of his young mistress, and the crushing blow it would be to her if her father's villany were discovered, his feelings became hardened; but the next moment, his mind would revolt from murder. And so he wandered about all day not knowing how to act, until at last a happy thought struck him.

He was in the habit, when going out in the evenings, of leaving the premises by passing through the coach-house, from which a small door opened out into a back street or alley. Under the coach-house was a large tank, rather deep, and generally partly full of rain water, collected there by means of pipes leading from the eaves-troughs. Directly opposite the small entrance through which Tim was accustomed to pass there was a heavy trap-door leading down into the cistern, for the purpose of examining its condition when necessary, but which was seldom opened, as there were pumps for lifting the water when required.

In this cistern Tim resolved to duck Solomon and Isaac, and when he had frightened them sufficiently, he concluded that they would abandon any further attempt on the Grey mansion. At all events, he hit upon this plan as likely to prove the most efficacious of any that had entered his head.

Just before his departure on this eventful evening Tim threw back the great door of the tank, and left it lying wide open as he went out to decoy his victims to their punishment.

There was what is called a high-old-time going on at the lager beer saloon when Tim entered it. The floor, generally so clean in appearance, with its white coating of sand, was now streaked here and there with lager where the revellers had emptied their glasses at each other. A darkey drummed away at a banjo in one corner, while several men were hoeing it down in regular plantation style in the middle of the room. It seemed as if the whole place was on a spree, and that the proprietor had gone clean out of his senses. Tim was astonished at what he saw, for the saloon bore a good character for respectability; but, as the proprietor remarked to Tim in a half-drunken way, the best of saloons will get drunk sometimes.

The cause of this unusual state of affairs was soon discernible to our hero, when he observed Solomon and Isaac amongst the most hilarious, and spending their money freely. Tim conjectured that either they were screwing up their courage by the aid of excitement, or they were laying a trap for him to join in and get drunk. He was right in the latter surmise, for the two scoundrels had made their calculations to go on with their work that night, and were laying a snare for Tim to be-

come an easy prey to their schemes. They could not have played into his hands better, for he, to their delight, appeared to participate freely in the fun and frolic going on, and to drink heavily. When near midnight, Tim approached Solomon and Isaac, and in a spirit of seeming confidence told them how lonesome he was at the house, and how delighted he would be if they would come and have a friendly glass in his room. He appeared to be very drunk when he said this, and they, believing that he was thoroughly intoxicated, were more than pleased at the opportunity offered them. The three then set out together from the saloon, Tim pretending to be almost unable to walk, and making his way slowly between the two men. When they reached the coach-house door Tim fumbled in his pocket for the key, while his hand shook a little with excitement.

"Going to be all night before you open the door?" said Isaac.

"No—no," said Tim; "but I must—must be awfully—ly drunk—oh! here—here—it is," and he placed the key in the lock. He then threw open the door, and said: "Now—now—you chaps go in, and walk right ahead. I'll—I'll follow and—and close the door."

As he said this, he shoved Solomon and Isaac gently in front of him, and they, suspecting nothing, walked forward without hesitation.

Almost immediately there was a great, dull splash of water and a smothered cry. Tim's hair seemed to stand on end, and his eyes to start out of their sockets, as the thought flashed across his mind that perhaps his practical joke might turn out a serious one, and that the men might be drowned ere he could save them.

Then he heard Solomon's voice down in the cistern

in the midst of the plash, crying, "Oh! my cot! oh! my cot! Isaac, you are trowning me; my cot!" The next moment there appeared to be a dreadful struggle going on, and above the din could Solomon's voice be heard praying for mercy, and Isaac cursing him. It was two drowning men battling with each other for the mastery, each trying to save his life at the expense of the other. Then came a half-smothered cry: "Oh! my cot, have pity on me!" and the fierce struggle ceased; but there followed a sound like beating on the water, with no cry but a succession of low moans.

Tim, who had stood transfixed with horror at what he heard, now bounded across the trap, and rushed to where he knew there was a lantern. But his hands shook so much, and he was so excited, that it was with some difficulty and after considerable delay that he succeeded in striking a light. Then he caught up a rope lying near, and ran to the opening of the cistern. But when he lowered the lantern, so as to allow the rays to flash upon the water, all he saw was a pair of hands clutching at the air, as they disappeared from view. It was the last of Isaac, who had struggled hard to find some spot along the wall of the tank where he could support his head above water, but who finally had to succumb to fatigue, and was sinking for the last time.

Tim was indeed horrified when he looked down into the cistern. He had never thought of examining the state of the water in it before leaving for the saloon. If he had done so, he would have abandoned the idea of ducking Solomon and Isaac, for he now perceived, when too late, that, owing to the stables being little used, and the house being shut up, the rain water had accumulated

to such an extent that there was sufficient in the tank to drown a dozen men.

Tim now understood the cause of the struggle he had heard; it was Isaac trying to keep himself above water at the expense of his companion Solomon. He was transfixed with horror at what he had done; his teeth chattered, and he shivered as he sank back on the floor of the coach-house, wretched and exhausted. He would have given worlds to have seen Solomon and Isaac alive before him. His master and mistress were lost sight of in that fearful moment; all he could think of was the fact that he had become a murderer, and that the brand of Cain would be upon his brow for the rest of his life.

Thus he lay for some time, until the barking of a dog in a neighboring yard brought him to his senses. Then it occurred to him that self-preservation was necessary, and that he would have to take some immediate steps to clear himself from suspicion. No sooner had he realized the danger of his position than he at once set about covering up his tracks. Opening the coach-house door, he went out into the alley and ran at the top of his speed to the nearest police station, where he stated that two men had been drowned at Mr. Grey's house. Several policemen at once accompanied Tim, and with some difficulty fished out the bodies of Solomon and Isaac. Tim's version of the affair was that he, having been at the lager beer saloon, had become somewhat intoxicated, and the two men had brought him home; that he had accidentally left the trap-door open, and that they, having entered before him, had tumbled in before he thought of warning them of their danger. He described how the ac-

cident had sobered him, and how he had gone for the lantern for the purpose of assisting his companions, when he discovered that he was too late to be of any use. There was nothing to contradict Tim's statement, but everything to corroborate it,—the fact of his having gone away drunk from the lager beer saloon with Solomon and Isaac, on the most friendly terms, having been noticed by several. The landlord of the Anchor, fearing lest he might become implicated, never opened his mouth about what he knew, and so the verdict was death by accidental drowning, and Tim was freed from any suspicion in the matter. But our hero was a changed man from that night. Thus ended Mr. Grey's attempt to swindle the insurance companies, only one witness to his villany being alive, and he would never disclose the dishonor of his master.

CHAPTER XV.

THE drowning of the two men in the cistern of the Grey mansion created something of a sensation, and attracted a good deal of attention towards the house. The fact of its having been closed so long, and the continued absence of Mr. Grey and his daughter, gave rise to certain surmises as to the cause thereof. It had leaked out that Richard Grey had been a heavy loser at cards, and it was suspected that he had become embarrassed, and that everything was not as it should be in the Grey family. There was no one who felt these suspicions more keenly than George Selby, and he was thankful that Minna was absent from St. Louis while they were afloat. Tim had not let him into the secret of Solomon and Isaac's death, but letters from friends in California conveyed to him the intelligence that Grey was going to the dogs as fast as he possibly could. He had paid one or two drafts drawn on him from San Francisco, but as they were becoming rather too frequent for even his good-nature, he was obliged to refuse payment of any more, and had written Mr. Grey to that effect. He had not received any reply to his letter, but could not think that his refusal to pay the drafts was altogether the cause.

The rumors regarding Mr. Grey's difficulties having reached the ears of the mortgagees, who had advanced

money on the house and furniture, they, in order to secure themselves, foreclosed; and, to Tim's surprise, one fine morning an officer came and took possession, in the name of the law. Tim at once proceeded to Selby, and told him what had happened, but as no word had been received from Mr. Grey, nothing could be done to avert the blow. Selby was unable to advance the money, for he had been making heavy drains on his father's purse of late, and began to be really ashamed of himself for doing so. The truth is, that since Minna's influence had been removed, by her absence in New York, he had allowed himself to indulge more freely than ever in gambling and dissipation, and this, combined with the drafts drawn on him by Mr. Grey, had seriously crippled his finances. Selby, however, went to see the holders of the mortgage, and induced them to promise not to proceed further until he had time to visit New York and return. His reason for this was in order to acquaint Minna with the real state of affairs, and to see whether there were any articles in the house which she particularly desired to be saved from the common wreck. He had another motive, for he did not wish the girl to remain at his father's house in ignorance of her true position. He knew that she was very proud, and that she would never forgive herself for staying a moment with his parents in her altered circumstances, and she would probably not forgive him for allowing her to do so. Selby, therefore, decided to tell Minna the whole truth, and, if necessary, provide money for her in the shape of a loan to her father, until he could be heard from; for he was certain that she would not consent to continue longer a guest with his father and mother.

Of course, he was resolved to try and induce her to

stay, but he felt that it would be useless, until a dim hope arose in his mind that perhaps he might be able to win her for himself in this hour of trial, and through his mother's influence induce her to accept a permanent home in his family.

He therefore set forth on his delicate mission, and if the truth were told, he would sooner have faced any danger than have undertaken it.

The "Oaks," the residence of the Selbys, was a fine old place, situated a short distance from New York, on the banks of the Hudson. It commanded a fine view of the city, and also of the harbor and shipping in the distance, and although the house could boast of no great architectural beauty, it was a very large and substantial building built in the good old style. Numerous alterations and additions had evidently been made from time to time, until it now appeared to be a great rambling old-fashioned house, overgrown with moss in many places, while in others it had been modernized by recent improvements. The grounds were extensive and beautifully laid out, and immediately behind the house there was a well-preserved grove of oak-trees, from which the place had taken its name. The interior was just as old-fashioned in appearance as the exterior; the ceilings were low, and there were huge fire-places in many of the rooms, unused, it is true, by the present occupants, but which suggested great roaring fires of logs during the winter months in ye olden time. Selby's father was immensely wealthy, and had purchased the place soon after the birth of his son George, and it was his intention to bequeath it to his only child as a residence for him when he became of age and took unto himself a wife. Year by year old Mr. Selby had lavished money on the "Oaks,"

and under his care the grounds had become almost a paradise in beauty, and the house the most pleasant abode a man could wish to bring a bride to live in. Mrs. Selby had taken Minna to her heart, and had begun to look upon her as the future mistress of the "Oaks," and for that reason, it was her delight to expatiate upon all her husband had done and intended to do to make it a fit home for the wife of her darling son. The old lady, however, had gone about her match-making in a very shrewd manner; she had simply endeavored to win the girl's love for herself. She had sounded the praises of her son George in such a way as not to offend Minna's sensibility by allowing her to suppose that it was done to create a favorable opinion of him. Mrs. Selby was so fond, so proud of her son, that whatever she said about him sounded too much like coming from the heart to leave any such impression, and Minna, who had become very fond of the old lady, could hardly fail to share her feelings towards so good a son as George seemed to be. Mrs. Selby had only hinted, on one occasion, at her desire to have Minna for a daughter-in-law. It happened once, when they were chatting in the dusk of the evening; the old lady reclining in her great arm-chair, and Minna sitting on a stool at her feet, that Mrs. Selby stooped down and stroking the hair of the beautiful girl, said, "My dear, I do wish you were going to stay with us always—you have grown to be such a comfort to me."

The tears glistened in Minna's eyes, but she spoke not a word in reply, yet the words of the kind old lady made a lasting impression on her mind.

Minna frequently strolled through the shady grove during the afternoon, where, with a book for a companion, she would recline on the soft grass and pass

many a pleasant quiet hour. There she could look back with pleasure to the happy days when her mother and Elsie were alive. There she could forget the heartlessness of her father and her own loneliness; there she could revel to her heart's content in the peaceful happiness of the moment, and there she could indulge in the wish never to return to the gayeties of St. Louis. In the quiet stillness of the grove, only broken by the sweet chirping of the birds overhead, or the gentle swaying of the leaves stirred by the cool breeze, she would lie for hours dreaming of naught but happiness, abandoning herself to naught but the pleasant thoughts which caused the long sunny hours to glide all too swiftly away, and shutting out from her mind the recollection of past miseries and the dread of an uncertain future. It was the calm before the storm in the life of Minna Grey, those few pleasant months spent at the "Oaks:" she was on the eve of a rude awakening from her temporary happiness.

One afternoon, as she was strolling through the grove towards one of her favorite haunts, she heard a footstep behind her, and, turning, recognized George Selby. He had a cordial greeting from the fair girl, although quick as was the impulse to show her gratification, not the less speedy and natural became her anxiety to learn whether any news concerning her father had recently reached Selby, and if it had, what was its tenor? What had caused this visit to the "Oaks?" was it a wish to catch a brief glimpse of home joys? or was he the bearer of news in which she had a supreme interest? Such were the thoughts that passed through Minna's mind as she held out her hand to welcome Selby. The latter observed the change from pleasure to doubt which passed

across the features of the girl, and so he said, "I am afraid, Miss Grey, you have become a regular misanthrope in this old place, and are not glad to see your old friends."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Selby," said Minna, "I am very glad to see you; and I have to thank you for having enjoyed a very happy visit here indeed."

"I am pleased to hear you say so," replied Selby; "but you must have found it very quiet."

"It is just for that reason that I have enjoyed my visit," said Minna, "it has been such a pleasant rest for me, and your mother is so kind and indulgent, that I have really felt very much at home in the 'Oaks!'"

George Selby was just on the point of saying, "How I wish that you would make it your home indeed," but he checked himself, and merely replied, "I know my mother makes every one around her feel at home; there are few women like her in the world, Miss Grey; it would be better if there were more."

"There I agree with you," added Minna, "it would be well if there were more women like your mother, Mr. Selby; but what has brought you to the 'Oaks?' Are you on a visit home? or have you come with any message for me? It is such a long time since I heard from my father, that I am becoming quite anxious about him. Have you received a letter from him, Mr. Selby?"

"No, Miss Grey, I have not had a line from him for several weeks, and I am at a loss to account for his silence."

"Perhaps he is ill," said Minna, "with no one to nurse him or look after his comfort. It is so wretched to be in this state of uncertainty, I do not know what to do."

"Do not be alarmed on that score, Miss Grey; I

had letters from San Francisco by the last mail, in which his name is mentioned, and he was then in good health. No ! sickness is not the cause of his silence."

"What can it be, then ?" asked Minna ; "do you know ? If so, please do not hide anything from me."

"My dear Miss Grey, I have come to speak to you about your father, but it is nothing very dreadful, so do not be uneasy."

"Speak on, Mr. Selby ; I am not a child—please do not keep me in suspense."

George Selby now felt the difficulty of the task before him, and between a desire to spare Minna's feelings as much as possible, and at the same time acquaint her with the truth, he was rather at a loss how to proceed. In order, therefore, to gain a moment's time, he said, "Had we not better be seated, Miss Grey ? here is a nice spot," and he pointed to a rustic chair close by, under a fine old oak-tree.

Minna at once acquiesced, and walking over to the place indicated by Selby, seated herself while he threw himself on the grass at her feet.

"You know, Miss Grey, I would willingly spare you any pain," Selby commenced, "but I think it my duty to acquaint you with what I am about to say. In my opinion you ought not to be kept in ignorance of it."

"Then, in mercy's sake, tell me all about it," said Minna, rather petulantly. The next moment she was ashamed of her impatience and said, "Oh ! please, Mr. Selby, excuse me ; but do tell me at once what you have to say."

"I am afraid," replied Selby, "that your father has become involved in money matters, and that he is in serious difficulties. I am not thoroughly acquainted

with the particulars, but I know he was swindled a short time ago by a scoundrel out of a large amount of money."

"I was aware," interrupted Minna, speaking very calmly, "that he was embarrassed some time ago, but I understood that he had been able to recover himself."

"I am sorry to say that he has not been able, so far as I can learn, to find the man who swindled him, and, therefore, he cannot possibly have recovered his money; but I fear, if all I have heard is true, he has been very unfortunate with his speculations in San Francisco."

"Then, I suppose what you have to tell me is that we are ruined."

"No," answered Selby, "I hope it is not quite so bad, but it is very unfortunate that Mr. Grey has not written either you or me more fully about his affairs at this time."

"He has never been very communicative on such matters," said Minna, "and I know very little about his true position. Do you know anything about the speculations he engaged in? He must have lost a great deal of money, for I think he was looked upon at one time as a very rich man. How has he been so unfortunate, Mr. Selby? Do you know anything about it? If so, please tell me."

"I know that Mr. Grey used to invest his money in railroad and other kind of stocks; but in the present case his losses have occurred by his getting into the hands of a swindler."

"How did it happen?" asked Minna, determined to learn as much of the truth as possible.

Selby was rather staggered at this question, he had reason for thinking that Minna knew nothing about her

father's gambling propensities, and he did not wish to be the person to inform her ; yet it was necessary to tell her a part of the truth. So he replied, after some hesitation : "Your father, Miss Grey, unfortunately was induced to play cards with a swindler, who cheated him out of large sums of money before he was discovered, and ere he could be made to disgorge he left suddenly for parts unknown. That is the truth of the matter."

"I am very sorry to hear it," said Minna ; "I hope my father was not addicted to playing for money. I knew very little of his life outside our home, and I never sought to pry into his secrets."

"All gentlemen play more or less for money," said Selby, "but only blackguards cheat at cards."

"I am astonished," said Minna, "at this information. Your father, Mr. Selby, is a perfect gentleman, and he does not play for money."

"But, Miss Grey, you are too particular, I mean, of course, men of the world. My father you know has retired from active service."

Minna looked very grave ; she remembered how his mother had praised George Selby's good qualities, and the words he had just uttered were strangely at variance with the excellent character Mrs. Selby had given him. "Do you play for money, Mr. Selby?" she suddenly asked.

"A little, sometimes," was the evasive reply, "but no one thinks anything of that."

"Pardon me, Mr. Selby, I am very inexperienced in such matters, but it strikes me as a very dangerous practice. For your father and mother's sake I think you ought to give it up."

"Thank you, Miss Grey," said Selby humbly, "if you think so I will give it up."

George Selby, like many a man before him, gave a promise to the woman he loved, which probably he had every intention at the moment to keep, but which on the first temptation he managed to break with very little compunction.

Minna then asked him to explian more about the object of his visit, and then he told her how the house and furniture had been taken possession of by the people to whom her father owed money, how he had succeeded in keeping any further proceedings in abeyance until he could see her, and ended by saying, that the silence of Mr. Grey placed him in such a position that he did not know exactly what to do.

Minna was, in a measure, prepared to hear the worst, from the fact that her father had made known to her the desperate condition of his affairs when he asked for her mother's jewels. She remembered how he had told her that the very house they were living in, as well as the furniture, did not belong to them; so that she was not altogether surprised at what George Selby had told her. But when she realized that everything which her mother had prized would have to be sacrificed with the common wreck, her eyes filled with tears, and she could not refrain from sobbing at the thought of parting with many treasures that were very dear to her from their association with the past.

George Selby sympathized keenly with the poor girl, and to comfort her he said: "Do not take it so much to heart, Miss Grey, I know what can be done. Now cheer up, and listen to me. My old governor has any amount of money lying idle; I'll get him to pay off this mort-

gage, and your father will fix it when he returns. There, that is just the thing, the governor will do it in a minute."

"Oh! no! no! no! You misunderstand me, Mr. Selby; I would not hear of such a thing," said Minna. "I do not care about the loss of the house and furniture. I only regret having to part with some things that belonged particularly to my poor mother—the rest I do not care about."

"But you need not part with them," said Selby: "I will secure them for you if you will only give me a list of them. Tim can pick them out, you know. Come, now, you must not refuse this. Your father asked me to look after your comfort in his absence—he really did, and you must accept an advance from me. Mr. Grey and I have business relations with each other. It is merely a matter of business. He would do as much for me if necessary. There is no other way, Miss Grey, believe me; it is merely an advance. I will get it back from your father as soon as I can get a reply to my letter, which I mean to write him to-morrow."

"But suppose he is unable to repay you—you know he may have lost everything in California."

"In that case, it will make no difference, so far as I am concerned," replied Selby, "because your father entrusted me with some securities to hold for him, which will more than pay any advance I make to you. In fact, I mean to use them for your benefit if anything should happen to Grey."

Minna looked earnestly at Selby. "Are you telling me the truth, Mr. Selby, or are you merely devising an excuse to render me assistance without seeming to place me under an obligation?"

"I am telling you the truth," replied Selby, but in reality he was telling a huge falsehood. He saw it was his only plan, nor did he hesitate to adopt it, for he felt justified in using the deception.

Minna appeared satisfied, but she said, "I must return with you to St. Louis, Mr. Selby. I cannot stay here any longer now, and I am very much obliged to you for your kindness in coming to let me know—it was very thoughtful of you."

"Why not remain at the 'Oaks,'" suggested Selby, and allow me to look after matters in St. Louis? it would be better, I think."

"No," said Minna. "I am sorry to leave here, I have been so happy; but now I would feel miserable to stay any longer. What would people say if I should continue to be a visitor at the 'Oaks' under present circumstances? I must go and face the trial—there is no other course open for me. When do you return?"

"I would not give a fig for people's opinion!" said Selby. "Do not go away, Miss Grey, you have become such a comfort to my mother, she will miss you dreadfully. Say that you will stay."

"I am very sorry to leave, believe me I am, Mr. Selby; you have all been very kind to me, I will never forget it, but I must go—do not say anything more about it, for the idea of parting from your mother is painful to me; but I have quite decided to go—when do you return?"

"I am at your service, of course. I can return at any time you desire. I am very sorry you will not stay."

"Will you take me back to-morrow?" asked Minna. "I am so anxious now to get home—home," the word

faltered on her lips and tears filled her eyes. Alas! she had no home now, and the poor girl burst into sobs which she could not for the moment restrain, as she thought of the loneliness of the life before her.

Selby was deeply touched, and in a moment of impulse, he said: "Miss Grey — Minna — do not be angry with me, do not think that I would insult your feelings at this time, but I cannot bear to see you in this state. Do stay here, do not go away. You know that I love you. Oh! I have loved you so dearly from the first moment I met you. Won't you stay and be a daughter indeed to my mother, who loves you as she would her own child. Say, Minna, will you not?" and Selby seized the hands of the young girl and pressed them to his lips.

Minna did not answer at once, but gently withdrew her hand. The words of Selby were not unpleasant to her; still she was not prepared to entertain his proposal. She could not forget how Selby had remained true to her from the first, how gentle and thoughtful he had been always to her, and how now, in the hour of her trial, he had come forward to her assistance. She could not but feel grateful to him. Then her pleasant visit to the "Oaks;" the motherly kindness she had received at the hands of Mrs. Selby; the fondness of the old lady for her son, and evident attachment towards herself; and in striking contrast, she realized the utter hopelessness of her own position, and the selfish conduct of her father in leaving her, as it were, at the mercy of strangers— what could she expect from such a parent in the future? Is it a wonder that she hesitated about refusing Selby's offer? She was of a proud nature, however; she was beginning to love Selby, it is true, but her heart had

not wholly gone out to him, and therefore she answered, "You have been very kind to me, Mr. Selby; do not think me ungrateful, but I cannot stay here, and will you please not say anything more on this subject just now, not until this trouble is over. Then I promise you I will give you my answer."

"Only say that I may hope—only say that, Minna, and I will be content."

Minna bowed her head gently, and said, in a low voice, "Only let me get over this trouble—then, I think—I think you may hope. There has been no one so kind to me as you, since Elsie died."

Selby rose and looking down on Minna with beaming eyes, said: "You have made me a happy man this day, Minna. May God bless you for it!"

It was arranged that he and Minna would start for St. Louis the next day, and then he went and told his mother of his happiness, and when Mrs. Selby, on the following morning, pressed the sobbing girl to her bosom at parting, she said: "You will come back to us, my dear, won't you? I will look for your coming. May the Almighty watch over and guard you!"

Old Mr. Selby decided to complete his improvements at the "Oaks" without delay.

It was therefore considered by the Selbys as settled that Minna would return to the "Oaks" as the bride of their son George.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE sale of the Grey mansion and its handsome furnishing took place in due course, much to the astonishment of the fashionable people in St. Louis, who had always regarded Mr. Grey as a very wealthy man, and one of the last to be obliged to succumb to financial difficulties. Through the exertions of Selby, however, Minna managed to secure for herself the furniture belonging to the room which her mother had occupied, as well as a few articles which she particularly prized on account of their association with the past. Elsie was not forgotten, for several things belonging to the old nurse were selected and set aside by Minna, and then, when she had made her choice of all that she wished to retain from the wreck of her old home, she turned away from the house and left it never to enter its portals again. She succeeded in obtaining rooms in a quiet, respectable and inexpensive boarding-house, and there she settled down calmly to await news from her father. Tim took the break-up in the Grey family very much to heart. It seemed to the faithful lad as if he had lost the only friends he had in the world, and this, combined with the remorse he felt at having caused the death of two fellow-beings, made him very miserable indeed. Selby, however, took pity on him, and offered to employ him as his own servant, promising at the same time that he would be allowed to visit his young mistress every day, and attend to her wants the same as he

had always been accustomed to do. This arrangement pleased Tim very much, and he was grateful to Selby for his consideration. Minna, in her new life, began to experience the cold heartlessness of a fashionable world, and to judge of the sincerity of her supposed friends. Of all the many acquaintances who hovered near her in her days of prosperity, and flattered her when all was sunshine around her, only one or two remembered her in her time of adversity. Of the latter, strange to say, Mrs. Rolph was amongst the number, and Minna, who had never entertained very warm feelings towards her, was rather astonished at this apparent proof of sincerity in one whom she had never regarded as sincere.

Tim, however, who never could bear the widow, was not to be duped by her, and immediately concluded that she had some ulterior object in view. He stated this opinion to Selby in the following conversation, which took place immediately after one of his visits to his young mistress.

"Well, Tim," Selby had said, "how is Miss Grey to-day? Is she wearying in that dull place where she is staying?"

"Wearying badly, I think, sir, but she never says a word about it. Miss Grey is a very plucky young lady, sir,—she don't show her feelings, I mean, sir,—she don't complain much, but I know she is fretting herself away, Mr. Selby."

"I do not wonder at it. Not a word from her father yet—surely he will answer my letter, I wrote very strongly ind

"I don't know what to make of it," said Tim; "can it be that he has left San Francisco and gone after Langton?"

"I hardly think so," replied Selby, "because the last letters I received from California, referred to him as being there. No, I fear he is in serious trouble, and does not wish to write."

"Well, sir, it is a dreadful change that has come over him. He never used to be put out by anything, and if things went wrong, he was always as cool and calm as if nothing had happened."

"Yes," said Selby, "he was noted for his quiet determination; but he has had a very bad time of it, Tim —enough to change any man."

"True, sir, a very bad time indeed; but it's the young mistress I pity most; he might write to her."

"Have many of her old friends called on her?" asked Selby.

"Devilish few, sir; they think she is down now, and it's the way of the world to kick a woman when she's down, you know, sir."

"Well, Tim, it is too true, women have a hard time generally when misfortune overtakes them. A man can fight it out if he has sufficient backbone, but a woman— God help her!"

"Do you know, sir," said Tim, "I've often heard people talk of how Indians use their women, how they make them work, and look down on them, sir; but I'm thinking that we white folks use our women just as bad as Indians do, and much worse for that matter."

"By Jove, Tim, you have become a great moralizer; but I think your views are very extreme on the woman question; draw it a little milder, my boy."

"Not a bit of it, sir; look at our factory girls, our sewing girls, the wives of poor men, the wives of the rich, the outcast women who have no home and

had set her heart on marrying Mr. Grey, but he was at a loss to understand why, in his altered circumstances, she should continue to desire the connection. He did not give her credit for feeling any love towards his late master, and therefore he was altogether puzzled at her still wishing to obtain him for a husband. Yet the latter was the only theory he could advance for her apparent friendliness to Minna. On general principles, however, he concluded that no matter what Mrs. Rolph's intentions might be, her reason for visiting his young mistress was not dictated by feelings of true friendship.

Selby, however, thought it very good of Mrs. Rolph to call on the young girl when so many had turned their backs on her, and he felt rather annoyed at Tim's free-and-easy way of speaking about her. He, however, had reason to wish in after years that he had paid more attention to Tim's opinion.

Our readers have probably guessed Mrs. Rolph's reason for appearing friendly to Minna. It was only to carry out her scheme of revenge on Selby, whom she blamed more than ever for her disappointment with Mr. Grey. She even began to think that Selby was in some way connected with the cause of Mr. Grey's strange disappearance, and that it was only part of a game played to win the daughter. Her plans with Rufus Holt had been partly upset by Minna's protracted stay in New York; but now she was bent on following them up, and if she found herself too late to prevent a marriage between Miss Grey and Selby, she had another and a worse scheme in view to gratify her revenge. She had abandoned all idea of marrying Mr. Grey. The sale of the Grey mansion and the now well known utter ruin of Mr. Grey had changed her sentiments towards him; but

somehow she felt that Selby in some way was at the bottom of it all, and on him she was determined to vent her displeasure.

When she called on Minna, she was very kind and affectionate in her manner, and once more urged the young girl to come and stay with her. Minna was very gratified, but declined the invitation, saying that she could not bear to go anywhere under the circumstances; but she allowed Mrs. Rolph to worm herself into her confidence to such a degree, that the widow left her with the knowledge that it was as good as settled she would become the wife of George Selby.

The next day Mrs. Rolph sent for Rufus Holt, and when that young gentleman presented himself, she said:

"Do you know the charming Miss Grey has returned?"

"I heard so," replied Holt; "she's been away a deuced long time."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Rolph, "and Selby has made good use of his time; they are as good as engaged to be married."

"Indeed! By jingo, I'm glad, it saves me a heap of trouble," said Holt.

"Not if you intend to keep your promise with me," replied the widow. "It is true I think you are too late to be able to cut Selby out; but I have other plans now, and you must help me to carry them out."

"I think, Mrs. Rolph, you are bound to get me into a scrape; but you are one of my best friends, and you see one must stick to their friends, and so I'll do my best for you."

"Then, to commence with, Holt, I want you to leave St. Louis."

"Leave here!" exclaimed Holt; "how the deuce will I manage to live anywhere else? By jingo, I didn't expect this."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Rolph, "it will only be a temporary absence, and I think," she added, meaningly, "that I can assist you to live very comfortably while you are away."

"That alters the case," answered Holt; "but where do you wish me to go; not to Africa, I hope, or some such outlandish place."

"Only to New York," said Mrs Rolph; "you know I lived there before I came here, and have some very warm friends in that city. I will give you letters of introduction, which will pave the way for you, and make things very comfortable."

"Yes," said Holt, hesitatingly, "that is all very well, but——"

"Oh! I know," interrupted the widow; "but do not be uneasy, I will provide amply for you."

"Ah!" said Holt, now at his ease; "very well, I am agreeable to anything which will please you, Amelia. When do you wish me to go?"

"I want you first to go to Selby, and tell him you are leaving St. Louis to settle in New York; ask him to give you a letter of introduction to his father. He will give it to you at once."

"And then, what next?" asked Holt; "tell me the whole affair, so that I'll understand it."

"When you reach New York, you will call at the 'Oaks,' which is the name of old Mr. Selby's place, and then you will become a frequent visitor there. The Selbys will receive you well on the strength of your being a friend of their son George, and you will have no diffi-

culty in establishing yourself on a good footing with them."

"This is all very pleasant," interrupted Holt, "as far as you've gone; but I don't see what the deuce you are driving at, Amelia."

"If you will have patience I'll explain all to you," said Mrs. Rolph. "As you are aware, I knew Selby in New York. The truth is, we were then great friends, and he told me that his father intended to hand over the 'Oaks' to him when he became married, and that it was a hobby of the old gentleman to add fresh improvements to the place every year, in order to have it as near perfection as possible when his son brings his wife to live in it. Now, in my opinion, Selby's marriage with Miss Grey will not be delayed very long, and I want you to be established as a friend of the family before that event happens. I want you then to make yourself particularly agreeable to Selby's young wife, and at the same time to worm yourself into being apparently a close friend of Selby himself. Do you think you can manage this very simple business, Holt?"

"So far I don't see anything particularly difficult in it; but say, Amelia, I think I smell a big rat ahead of what you have been telling me, and, by jingo, I am of opinion that you intend getting me into very hot water. It is a clear case of jealousy, murder, &c., all cut and dry beforehand, and I am to be the murdered party, I see."

Mrs. Rolph, laughed. "You are not such a fool, Rufus, as you look."

"Thank you, Amelia," said Holt.

"But," continued the widow, "you need not be alarmed—there will be no murder, and I will see that you are unharmed. You must, however, be very par-

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ticular to cultivate Selby's friendship, as soon as he goes to live at the 'Oaks' for your own safety it is very particular that you do this."

"All right, Amelia, I'll follow instructions, but, by jingo, I don't want to be cut off in my youth by an enraged husband. So be careful, Amelia."

"You can draw on me from New York," said Mrs. Rolph, "when you require to do so. You are under my care now, but you needn't squander my money."

Rufus Holt, when he left the widow's house, went in search of Selby, and when he had found him, he said:

"I say, Selby, I have made up my mind to leave here. I've got tired of St. Louis, I am going to live in New York."

"Sorry you're going away, Ruf," said Selby; "is there anything I can do for you in New York, my people live there you know."

"Well," said Holt, "I know very few people there, and I would be very glad indeed if you could give me some introductions."

"Why, certainly I will, of course, my dear fellow, I can put you all right, and I'll give you a letter to the old governor; he'll be delighted to see you out at the 'Oaks.'"

And so George Selby, in his open-hearted way, gave Rufus Holt a letter of introduction to his father—a letter which was to be the means of causing him years of unhappiness in his after life.

Mrs. Rolph was laying a fiendish snare for Selby and Minna Grey, the letter of introduction given to Rufus Holt being the first act in the plot conceived by the vindictive woman.

CHAPTER XVII.

At last letters were received from Richard Grey by Minna and Selby. To the former he wrote that his ill-luck seemed to follow him, and that since his arrival in San Francisco, he had met with so many heavy losses in mining speculations that he was now a ruined man. He did not intend to return to St. Louis until he had made every effort to redeem his fallen fortunes. He regretted very much the loss of their old home, but he had been unable to prevent it, and therefore he had allowed the mortgagees to proceed without trying to postpone the evil day, as it would only have been heaping up more liability in the shape of interest. He then referred to Selby, who, he said, had written to him to get his consent to their marriage. He wrote in the highest terms of Selby, and intimated that, since he might be a wanderer for an indefinite period, it could be some satisfaction to him to know that his daughter had a home and a protector in his absence. It was a cold, selfish letter, cold and selfish as the man who wrote it, with hardly a touch of affection in its composition. He did not seem to blame himself for having left her a young girl alone to face trials from which an older and more experienced woman would have shrank. Minna burst into tears when she had finished reading her father's letter—that letter which she had so longed to receive, hoping that it would

contain one grain of comfort to her broken spirit, only to find it barren even of that love and affection which one naturally expects to receive from a parent. She felt indeed utterly alone in the world at that moment, and thought how different it would have been if her mother and Elsie had been spared to her.

To Selby Mr. Grey wrote that he had at last traced Langton, who it appears was in Australia, and that he had resolved to follow him there. He stated that all his speculations in mining stocks had proved to be utter failures, and that at the time of writing he had not even sufficient money to pay his passage to Australia. He expressed his pleasure at the prospect of Minna becoming Selby's wife, and in a pathetic sort of manner asked him to be kind and gentle to her. He never referred to Selby's having refused to honor his drafts, but concluded by saying that he had drawn on him for a small amount to enable him to leave San Francisco. He did not mention Mrs. Rolph's name, simply because he had abandoned all idea of a union with her, as he rightly supposed he would be refused by her, since it was known that he was a ruined man ; and therefore he had ceased to feel any interest in the widow. Strange to say, he did not forget Tim, but asked Selby to take him into his service ; and inquired, in a casual way, how it happened that the two men were drowned in the coach-house tank, as he had only received a meagre account of the accident through the newspapers. Little did Selby imagine that Mr. Grey, as he wrote the inquiry about Solomon and Isaac's death, was cursing the fate which prevented them from setting fire to the premises on which he held very heavy insurance policies.

Selby at once visited Minna, to communicate the

fact of his having received a letter from Mr. Grey, and found her in a very disconsolate state of mind. On asking the reason of her sadness, Minna told him that she had heard from her father, and that she was very much pained at the contents of his letter. He then told her that he also was in receipt of news from San Francisco; and then the two began to compare notes, although Selby did not acquaint Minna with all the particulars contained in his epistle. He, however, took the opportunity of pressing for an answer to his suit—the answer which Minna had promised to give him—and she, seeing how helpless she had been left by her father, and yearning for the tender sympathy of Selby's mother, said that she would like to return to the "Oaks," and that she would be guided by his mother in the answer she would give him. She felt that she needed the advice of a good woman, in order not to act too hastily in the step she was about to take; and there was no one so good in her opinion, no one she could trust like Mrs. Selby. George Selby was delighted, because Minna could not have suggested anything that would have given him greater pleasure, and he felt confident his mother would not advise a postponement of his marriage. Moreover, he appreciated the feeling which prompted Minna to go to his mother for advice, and felt all the more tender towards her for it. Through all his careless, aimless sort of life, George Selby had one great redeeming trait in his character—he was passionately fond of his parents, and no son was prouder of a mother than he was of good old Mrs. Selby.

Minna therefore returned to the "Oaks," and then it was settled that as soon as all the necessary arrangements could be made, her wedding with George Selby

would take place without delay. Selby in the mean time returned to St. Louis, to wind up his affairs in that city, and to bid adieu to scenes in which he had acquired habits which were not easily eradicated, and which were destined to break forth afresh, and bring trouble to himself and his young wife.

Rufus Holt had been a frequent visitor at the "Oaks" since his arrival in New York, and there Minna became acquainted with him; although he had been one of the guests on the occasion of the ball at her father's house, she had no recollection of meeting him there, although she had frequently seen him in St. Louis; but his being accepted by Mr. and Mrs. Selby as a friend was sufficient for her to regard him in the same light, still she could not bring herself to like him. Holt, however, did his best to make himself agreeable, and, having plenty of spare time, he employed a portion of it in performing little commissions for Mrs. Selby during the busy time of preparation for the wedding, and, of course, in this way he sometimes managed to be of service to Minna. It so happened that George Selby, finding Holt on such intimate terms with the family, chose him as one of his groomsmen, which greatly delighted Mrs. Rolph when she heard of it.

In due course, therefore, the marriage of George Selby and Minna Grey took place. At Minna's request it was a quiet affair, and only a few of the most intimate friends of the Selbys were invited. Immediately after the wedding breakfast, which succeeded the ceremony, Selby and his young wife left on a trip, during which they were to visit Niagara, Toronto, and then pass down the St. Lawrence, through the beautiful scenery of the Thousand Isles, the Long Sault and Lachine Rapids

to Montreal, and then back *via* Lake Champlain to New York.

It was arranged that, on their return, they should occupy the "Oaks," old Mr. and Mrs. Selby to live there with them during the balance of their lives. George Selby had entered into an agreement with one of the leading publishing houses in New York to take an interest in the business, and his father, anxious to retain him near the old home, had willingly offered to supply the necessary capital. Everything looked bright for the young couple, and Minna, although regretting her father's misfortunes and the unsettled life he was leading, could not but feel happy. A kind husband—a comfortable home—the constant companionship of a good woman like Selby's mother, with no troubles that she could foresee, it seemed as if she had left all her trials and misery behind her forever, and that naught but happiness lay in store for her during the rest of her life. Alas! her real trials were only about to commence—but we will not anticipate.

It may appear strange that Richard Grey did not make a second attempt to obtain his daughter's jewels, when his affairs became so desperate; but, as will be seen hereafter, he had not abandoned the idea of gaining possession of them; he was merely holding it in reserve for a future occasion. When he heard of Minna's marriage with Selby, he felt that he had a source of supply from which he could draw the needful when necessary; but he resolved first to visit Australia to find Langton, from whom he was still as determined as ever to regain a portion if not all his lost property. Like many a man before him, on visiting San Francisco he had been tempted to take part in mining speculations, and had invested

every cent he could raise in the stock of several companies. But he had been unsuccessful, and, one by one, the companies in which he had risked his money proved bogus concerns, until indeed, as he wrote Selby, he found himself without sufficient means to pay his passage to Australia.

When he lost his fortune, and was obliged to let his house and furniture in St. Louis go to the hammer, he gave up all idea of Mrs. Rolph and her wealth. He knew very well that she was a thorough woman of the world, and that she had only set her eyes on him for a husband because she wished to secure her own position in society by marrying a man of means and high standing. He had possessed both these requisites in the eyes of the widow before he met Langton ; but now he was merely a ruined gambler, almost an outcast, and he knew Mrs. Rolph sufficiently well to understand that as such he had ceased to be an attraction to her.

Mrs. Rolph, on the other hand, suffered a great disappointment when she knew of Mr. Grey's ruin. She had, as we have already mentioned, looked forward to becoming the mistress of the Grey mansion, when, with her own and Mr. Grey's wealth combined, she would have succeeded in gaining the coveted position of being one of the ruling powers in the best society of St. Louis. But with Mr. Grey's ruin all her hopes collapsed, and she began seriously to contemplate leaving for some other field, where she could probably be more successful in her matrimonial intrigues. Strange to say, she blamed Selby as the principal cause of her disappointment, for she believed that he, in some way, was at the bottom of Mr. Grey's troubles, and in her own way of reasoning accused him of conniving at the

father's misfortunes in order to obtain some hold by which he could win the daughter. Minna's visit to New York, and the interest which Selby seemed to take in her subsequently, only strengthened the idea, and made Mrs. Rolph more determined than ever to gratify her revenge on him. At one time in his life, Selby had been on very intimate terms with the widow; but now that he was about to be married she fancied that he wished to drop her, as if she was not a desirable acquaintance for his wife. These thoughts made her feel very bitter towards Selby, and urged her on in her almost diabolical schemes against his peace of mind.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LIFE at the "Oaks" went on very smoothly for about a twelvemonth, after the return of George Selby and Minna from their wedding trip. Nothing occurred to mar in the slightest degree the happiness of the young wife, who, aided by the wise counsels of his mother, succeeded in making George perfectly contented with the quiet routine of home life, and reconciled to the loss of that excitement and dissipation to which he had become so accustomed before his marriage. For a time Selby settled down regularly to work, and took a good deal of interest in the business of the publishing house with which he had become connected, and he even contemplated the idea of becoming an author, and giving to the world his first literary effort of any importance. He attended regularly at his office while the novelty of his new life lasted, and in the evening Minna would be on the lookout, so as to be the first to greet him on his arrival home. Old Mr. and Mrs. Selby were very happy in seeing the change which had come over their son, and took great pleasure in watching the unity of feeling and the perfect enjoyment which the young couple felt in each other's society. To them, Minna seemed perfection, and they blessed her for having been the cause of inducing their son to abandon his roving habits. The great hope of their life was being realized when they saw the "Oaks" occupied and en-

joyed by George Selby and his wife, and the old gentleman hardly allowed a day to pass without pointing out to Minna some feature in the place which he had planned for her and his son.

Tim had accompanied Selby to New York, and was domiciled once more as the favorite servant of his young mistress. He was no longer the sprightly lad he used to be when in the service of Richard Grey. He had become grave in his demeanor, and very retired in his habits; seldom mixing with the other servants, but devoting his time almost wholly in attending to the wishes of his mistress, and even sometimes anticipating them. To George Selby, Tim became very much attached, and was treated with the same consideration and confidence at the "Oaks," as he had received in St. Louis.

Richard Grey had not gone to Australia, as he had proposed doing. Some infatuation had kept him in San Francisco, and Selby had been obliged to pay several drafts drawn on him by his father-in-law; until at last, he began seriously to consider the advisability of putting a stop to any further demands of the kind. The fact is, Mr. Grey was sinking lower and lower in the scale of respectability, and George Selby, who was receiving sad accounts regarding him, almost dreaded his coming to New York, to visit them. He had been informed by his correspondents in San Francisco, that Grey was drinking very hard, and had begun to wear a very shabby and dissipated appearance. Of course Minna was kept in ignorance of her father's downward course, and although she knew that he was still in California, she had no idea that he was going to destruction in the way we have described. George Selby could not bear to tell her the painful truth, but greatly feared that

some day it would come with a fearful force to crush his poor young wife and destroy her happiness. He had no idea, however, that the blow would prove to be so dreadful a one as it afterwards turned out to be.

Mrs. Rolph had removed to New York, and was living in that city; but she was only an occasional visitor at the "Oaks," during the lifetime of old Mr. and Mrs. Selby. The reason for this was, that she stood in some dread of the old lady, who had a very penetrating way of discovering the dross from the gold amongst those who visited her son's wife; and the widow, being shrewd, and perceiving this characteristic in Selby's mother, thought it wise to refrain from becoming a frequent visitor, lest Minna's mind might be prejudiced against her. She knew that old Mrs. Selby was aware of the intimacy that existed between her and George, at one time, and judged, therefore, that she would not look on her favorably as a friend of his young wife. Mrs. Rolph, however, played her cards well, with the object of gratifying her vindictive spirit against Selby, and she behaved with so much prudence, that she succeeded in preventing any strong feeling against her at the "Oaks." The time was coming, and she prepared herself for it, when she would be able to throw off this restraint and endeavor to ingratiate herself in Minna's good opinion, in order to accomplish her diabolical purpose of revenge.

Rufus Holt continued to live in New York, in pretty much the same sort of way as he had managed to exist in St. Louis. He still found Mrs. Rolph of great assistance at times when he was cornered for funds, and under that lady's instructions, he managed to keep on a very good footing at the "Oaks." Strange to say, he

and Selby had become very intimate friends; so much so, that their intimacy became proverbial amongst the acquaintances of the latter. Minna had not any particular amount of respect for Holt; but looked on him rather as a harmless sort of fellow—lazy and good for nothing, but playing the lady's man. She could not distinguish any vice in him, and, therefore, never felt that he was unfit to be a companion of her husband. Holt played his part well, for more reasons than one; in the first place, he was pleasing his benefactress, Mrs. Rolph, by so doing; and in the next, he found the "Oaks" a very agreeable place to visit, whenever he wished; and, in addition to this, he had a useful friend in Selby, who was able to assist him in more ways than one.

There was nothing, therefore, to interfere with the happiness of either Selby or Minna during the first year of their married life; but at the end of that time they received a shock which was only the precursor of future troubles.

One day Tim rode into the city as quickly as it was possible for him to do so, and on reaching Selby's office, he threw himself from his horse, and rushed into the presence of his master almost breathless from excitement, and the exertion of his ride.

Selby was sitting at his desk writing, but when he observed the disturbed countenance of Tim at the door, he quickly rose, and asked hurriedly if anything was the matter.

"I've ridden in, sir, almost at a full jump," said Tim, "and it's your father, Mr. Selby, who's taken very ill; you must come at once, and bring the doctor, or if I was you, I'd bring two, for he's awful bad."

"My father ill, Tim?" answered Selby, "he looked as well as usual when I left this morning. What is the matter?"

"I don't know, sir; nobody knows, but he's very bad, and no time's to be lost. It took him very sudden, sir."

Selby at once put on his hat, and giving instructions to Tim where to find the doctor, and how to bring him to the "Oaks" without delay, he jumped on the horse at the door, and rode as fast as the wearied animal would carry him.

Tim stood a moment looking after him. "He'll kill that horse, sure," he muttered, and then he hurried off for the doctor.

Old Mr. Selby was suddenly stricken down by a fit of apoplexy, and when George reached the "Oaks," his father was perfectly unconscious. When the doctor arrived, which he did very soon after, he used every means to restore the patient, but the age of the latter told against him, and ere night, George Selby's father had breathed his last.

It was all so sudden and unexpected, that George Selby could hardly realize that he had lost his parent, of whom he was so fond. Only that morning he had left him in apparent good health and excellent spirits, and now he lay dead, cut off as it were in a moment. George and Minna felt the loss they had sustained very deeply; but the state of Mrs. Selby was such as to cause them great anxiety, and prevent them from giving way to their feelings of grief, as they might otherwise have done. Old Mrs. Selby was completely prostrated by the sudden death of her husband. She lay for hours like one in a stupor, speaking not a word, neither appearing to observe the presence of her son or Minna. It would have been

a relief to them if she could have shed tears, or shown some outward sign of sorrow; but she lay so quiet, so utterly crushed, that it seemed as if she too would be taken from them. Minna sat by the couch of the old lady, and tenderly sought to soothe her, hoping to break the dreadful spell which hovered over her; but for a long time her efforts were of no avail. George Selby was devotedly attached to his mother, and as he knelt by her side, he besought her to speak to him, only one word, and as he looked at her face, so pinched and drawn, and so unconscious of his presence, he could not withhold his tears, as he lovingly caressed, and stroked back the straggling gray hairs from her brow. Minna sobbed by her husband's side, and her thoughts referred back to the time when she knelt by the bedside of her own dying mother, and of the faithful Elsie, and then she felt how hard it was, just as she had found a second loving mother on whom to trust, to have her taken away like the other.

Old Mrs. Selby, however, lingered for some time, but did not recover from the shock of her husband's sudden death. Day by day she sank lower and lower, until, a little over a month from the time when Selby's father was stricken down, she calmly passed away to join him in that home from which there is no return. George and Minna had watched constantly by her bedside, only relieving each other at times in order to take a little rest, and no effort was spared by them to rouse her from the lethargy into which she had sunk, but without success. It was a sad blow to Selby, the loss of his parents, and to Minna it seemed as if the "Oaks" would never appear the same to her without the presence of the dear old couple who had been so gentle and

thoughtful to her. It made her cling closer to her husband for sympathy and support, while he, in his affliction, was even more tender than usual to his young wife. It seemed almost as if the good spirit of old Mrs. Selby hovered near them to bind them more closely than ever to each other. Would that the same kind spirit had watched over them to guide them aright for the rest of their lives.

After the death of his mother Selby became rather unsettled, and although he continued to attend to his business, he did not appear to feel the same interest in it as he had shown previously. He was now a very wealthy man, his father having left him an immense fortune; and probably this fact had something to do with his lack of interest in the publishing house. He began to associate more with Rufus Holt, and gradually allowed himself to be drawn into the company of men whom his better judgment told him he ought to avoid, for the sake of his young wife's peace of mind. He, however, reasoned that he would keep a check on himself, and that he loved Minna too well to allow himself to neglect her for such pleasures as he had enjoyed before his marriage. Alas! it was only the first symptom of the change in his mode of life which was destined to wreck not only his own, but Minna's happiness.

CHAPTER XIX.

One day, as George Selby sat in his office, a stranger presented himself at the door, and, after a slight hesitation, advanced and held out his hand.—"You don't appear to know me," he said to Selby, who was scanning him curiously.

In a moment George had risen and taken the stranger's hand, which he shook without appearing, however, to be very glad to see him.

"You have changed, Grey, a good deal, and I did not recognize you certainly for a moment. When did you arrive?"

It was indeed Richard Grey, but sadly altered from his former self. He had the same cold glitter of the eye; but, instead of the finely chiselled features which he once possessed, his face had a swollen, bloated appearance, showing plainly that he had become a hard drinker. His clothes were not what might be termed shabby, but he wore them in such a slovenly manner, so different from the neat and gentlemanly way he used to dress when in St. Louis, that it was no wonder Selby did not recognize him at once.

When the first greeting was over, Selby thought of Minna, and the shock she would experience when meeting her father in his present deplorable condition. He pitied his young wife, and wished now that he had not concealed from her the real condition of Mr. Grey's affairs.

He would have made any sacrifice almost at that moment to have prevented his father-in-law from visiting the "Oaks," but he saw that such a course was impossible; and when his visitor asked about Minna, and expressed a desire to see her, he at once invited him to become his guest. He merely stipulated, that they should not go out until he had time to prepare Minna for the visit, framing an excuse that she was rather delicate since the death of his parents. Mr. Grey was perfectly satisfied to wait, not being burdened with any great warmth of paternal affection; and then Selby's only hope of preparing his wife for the dreaded interview with her father, lay in the chance that Tim, or some of the servants, would call with a message from the "Oaks" during the afternoon.

Mr. Grey at once made himself at home in his son-in-law's office, and after chatting for a while over his career in San Francisco, and the many changes which had taken place during his absence, he quietly seated himself in an arm-chair, and taking a newspaper, made himself very comfortable for the time being. Selby sat on thorns of anxiety, until at last Tim made his appearance with a note from his mistress, which he was just in the act of handing to Selby, when his eyes fell on the figure of Mr. Grey reclining in the chair. Tim dropped the note on the carpet in his amazement at seeing his old master before him.

"Lord, sir, you took me all of a heap—never expected to see you—but I am so glad to see you back;" and the faithful lad wrung the hand of Mr. Grey until the latter winced.

"Hold on, Tim," he cried, "or you will put my arm out of joint. I'm happy to see you, my lad, but you

don't look like your old self at all; what has happened to you, Tim?"

Tim in a moment recollected the drowning of Solomon and Isaac, and the part which his master had played in that tragic affair; he looked uneasily at Mr. Grey, and his color came and went as he answered slowly, "We've had a deal of trouble here, sir, and—and—I suppose it's worn me a bit, sir."

"Yes," said Selby, "Tim has never been the same since the two men were drowned in the tank at your house—it was an awful affair."

Tim looked at his old master, but the latter never moved a muscle of the face, but quietly remarked, "It was a devil of a queer job that; you must have been awfully drunk, Tim, to have let them drown before your eyes." It was an unfeeling speech, and Tim held up his hands as if to ward off a blow.

"Please, sir," he said earnestly, "do not say any more about it; I've never had a moment's rest of mind since it happened. Please, sir, say no more about it." Mr. Grey then dropped the subject, and Selby wrote a note to Minna, telling her of her father's arrival, and not to be surprised when she saw the great change that had taken place in him; hinting at the same time, that things must have gone very badly with him in San Francisco, judging from his appearance. He said that he was detained in the city for an hour or two, but he would bring her father out with him.

While Selby was writing his note, Tim and Mr. Grey were chatting about old times; but when he had finished it, he at once despatched the lad with it, and told him to lose no time in returning to the "Oaks."

Tim required no second bidding, but set off at once,

and soon delivered the note to his mistress, who, on reading it, became quite excited.

"Did you see him, Tim?" she asked, "and how does he look? Tell me all about it—I wish he had come with you."

"He don't look well at all, ma'am," said Tim abruptly. "He ain't at all like my old master."

"How, Tim? what do you mean?"

"Well, ma'am, he ain't so nice looking—don't keep himself so tidy—he's got careless, but that's because he's been away from us, ma'am—nobody to look after him; but I was so glad to see him, and he'll come all right again very soon."

Tim still retained his old privileged way of speaking to his mistress, and he could not have prepared her better for the change in her father than by uttering the words he had used.

She saw at once that something was wrong, and conjured up a picture of her father, so careworn, sad, ill-dressed and miserable in appearance, that she was fully prepared to tender him her sympathy, and felt quite impatient until he should arrive, so that she might be able to comfort him in his trouble. But when he came she was indeed shocked to see before her the same cold, unfeeling look in his face that she remembered so well; and, instead of a careworn and sad individual, a man who evidently had given way to dissipation, and whose every look indicated a recklessness of feeling, and a loss of honor and pride. Although she had never been able to feel any love for her father, she had always been proud of his personal appearance, and had always regarded him as one who, although cold and selfish, was nevertheless proud and honorable. Even when he asked for

her mother's jewels, she thought that it was only to save his name from dishonor that he had come to her as a last resource. Now, however, she could not conceal from herself the fact that he had become a perfect wreck in body and mind, that any sympathy for him would be lost, and that he required neither comfort nor pity. She could hardly credit her eyes, that the bloated, slovenly man who stood before her was her father, and shame instead of pity took possession of her as she looked at him.

Richard Grey did not fail to observe the pain and disappointment which Minna's face showed so plainly, and as he shook hands with her (he did not attempt to kiss her) he said:

"You find me greatly changed, I suppose, Minna?"

"Very much, father," she answered, "very much indeed; but George tells me you have had a dreadful time in California."

"Things did not go well with me, certainly. I must say, however, that you look very well" (then turning to Selby), "she does not look at all like an invalid. You've taken remarkably good care of her, my boy; but she's worth looking after, eh, Selby?—Why, Minna, he told me you were delicate, and I never saw you looking better."

Selby looked embarrassed, but he quickly answered "She has never been quite herself, Grey, since my father and mother's death." Then, to change the subject, he added, "but let me show you to your room; dinner will be ready soon, and I suppose you feel about as hungry as I do myself."

When George Selby and her father left her Minna remained for some time in deep thought, humiliated at the great change for the worse which had come over

Mr. Grey, and she was only aroused from her unpleasant reverie by the announcement of dinner.

In the evening Selby and Richard Grey lit their cigars and strolled together through the grounds, and there the latter told how he had fully intended going to Australia after Langton, but that he had been delayed in San Francisco from time to time in the hope of some of his mining stocks becoming valuable. He referred bitterly to the total collapse of his fortune, and said that he felt sure of yet meeting the man who had despoiled him of it, and that he had not abandoned his search for him. He explained his visit to New York to be for two reasons : first, to see his daughter, and, secondly, he was in need of money. He confessed having got in with a pretty bad lot in San Francisco, and that he had drank very hard of late ; but as an excuse, he added that it was enough to make any man drink to have gone through what he had done.

Selby at once saw the reason for his father-in-law's visit, and made up his mind that he would have to assist him in order to shorten his stay at the "Oaks." The truth is, Selby felt rather ashamed of his old friend Grey, and at the same time formed the idea that it would add to Minna's peace of mind if her father did not remain long a visitor ; so he resolved, whenever the question of money was again opened, to at once offer to advance the required amount. But Grey made no direct demand on him that evening, and so the conversation turned on other subjects.

Amongst others Selby mentioned that Mrs. Rolph was living in New York, and looked as charming as ever, and that sometimes she paid a visit to the "Oaks."

Grey replied that he did not wish to meet her. He

had given her up long ago and had no desire to renew the acquaintance. "You know, Selby," he said, "it was all very well when I had money, she was then very civil indeed; but as I am now, I do not wish to give her an opportunity to be cool to me."

"I don't think she would show any difference from her old manner to you, whatever she might feel."

"Don't you, old fellow?" said Grey smiling. "You don't know her then, and you are perhaps not aware how very intimate we were. Oh! no, my boy, I don't want to see Mrs. Rolph now."

The matter then dropped, and they entered the house to join Minna, who looked very pale. Selby at once noticed it, and going to her said in a kindly tone, "My dear, you do not look very well to-night; what is the matter?"

"My head throbs, George, but I am not ill. I will be better in the morning—do not be anxious."

Selby knew too well the cause of his wife's indisposition, but he merely said, "Your father will excuse you to-night I am sure, and you had better go at once and have some rest."

"Yes, Minna," said her father, "do not stay on my account. I will make myself at home with Selby."

Minna rose, glad to escape to her room, and left her husband and father together, little dreaming that it was to be the turning point in her life. She little imagined, while she tossed restlessly on her bed, that down stairs her father was sowing the seed which afterwards caused the ruin of her husband, and of herself.

CHAPTER XX.

RICHARD GREY and his son-in-law sat for hours together that night, talking over old times, and indulging rather freely from the bottle before them. The effect on Selby was to awaken in his mind some of his old desire for excitement, and to make him look upon his late quiet life as something of a hum-drum existence. Grey had impressed upon him the fact of his having wealth, and his ability to enjoy himself without being under obligation to any one for the means. Probably, if Selby had not drank so much wine, he would not have listened so readily to the words of his companion ; but, having listened, he allowed himself to be influenced, and like many a man, when giving way to temptation, he consoled himself with the idea that he could keep a proper check upon himself, and yet enjoy a little of the coveted pleasure. Alas ! however, he was not one of those men who could go a certain length and then stop ; and, although he would not acknowledge it at the time, his only safeguard was to resist altogether. The seed was sown that night which was to bear bitter fruit for both himself and his wife, and the man who broke the spell of his happy and contented life, was the one who ought to have warned him against, instead of encouraging him to a career of dissipation.

The next day, Minna appeared to have recovered

from her indisposition of the previcus evening, and Selby, therefore, took his departure for the office as usual, but Grey remained at the "Oaks," to rest from the fatigue of his late journey, and for several days he did not visit the city. During that time, Minna saw a good deal of her father, but she did not derive much pleasure from his society. She found him to be as cold and selfish as ever, and his troubles seemed to have embittered his life to such a degree, that he had become more cynical than ever in his disposition, and had grown coarse in his manners. She somehow dreaded an intimacy between him and her husband, and hoped that his stay at the "Oaks," or even in the vicinity of New York, would be of short duration. One day, in the course of a conversation between the father and his daughter, the former referred to her mother's jewels, and asked whether she kept them as careful as ever.

"Of course, father," Minna replied, "but I never wear them. I never will wear them."

"You are not like most ladies, for they would be proud to show them—they are very fine and very valuable."

"I have never considered their intrinsic worth, but their belonging to my dear mother makes them of priceless value in my eyes; I guard them as the most precious treasure I have."

"It has often occurred to me, Minna, that you are very foolish to keep them where they are, at the mercy of the first burglar who may break into the house. He would get a haul indeed, if he got them."

"But there is no danger of anything of the sort happening here; besides, a burglar would never find them where I keep them."

"And pray, where is this secure place?" asked Mr. Grey, in a casual careless sort of way.

"Oh!" said Minna, innocently, "I have beneath the drapery of my toilet table a drawer in which I keep them, and which is always locked. See here, I carry the key;" and she showed her father a small gold chain which she wore round her neck, with a tiny key attached to it.

Mr. Grey's eyes glistened as he saw it, and a look of satisfaction passed across his features. He had procured information very easily, which he had anticipated a good deal of difficulty in obtaining.

He at once changed the subject, and Minna, who had slightly trembled, lest he intended to demand them from her, breathed more freely; but had she known the thoughts that were flashing through the mind of her father at that moment she would have buried her jewels in some spot where he would never have found them.

In a few days Richard Grey commenced going to the city, in company with Selby, every morning, and for a time they returned together every evening, at the regular hour. Minna observed, however, that her husband appeared restless and uneasy on several occasions as if his thoughts were elsewhere than in his home and its surroundings. He frequently became impatient at trifles, and altogether a change appeared to have come over him. He was still as kind and loving as ever to her, and never allowed himself to show anything but gentleness towards her; but to the servants he very often showed an irascibility of temper unusual with him. His wife at once concluded that something was troubling his mind, and endeavored to find out from him the cause thereof, but without success. She wondered if the pres-

ence of her father at the "Oaks" was irksome to him, but abandoned that idea when she observed the friendly terms on which they seemed to be with each other. The change in her husband not only puzzled Minna, but it also caused her considerable anxiety, and this latter feeling was increased when Selby began to go to the city in the evenings with Mr. Grey, and not return, sometimes, until very late. The truth is, George Selby had experienced a hard struggle between his duty to his wife and his newly awakened desire for excitement. He knew very well that in the indulgence of the latter, he ran a fearful risk of ruining his home and his fortune, and that there was a danger of his becoming a slave to dissipation. The remembrance of his experience while in St. Louis was before him ; but he finally quieted his conscience by the thought that he would not go to such a length as he had then, and that he would simply act like other men of his acquaintance, who could indulge in a little fast life at times, and still be kind and affectionate in their own homes. He, however, never took into consideration that, in his case, he was about to indulge an appetite for pleasure which would be likely to grow rapidly, and that in the person of his father-in-law he had a dangerous companion, who would be sure to lead him into excess. Had he permitted honest reasoning to influence him, he would have acknowledged that his will was not strong enough to allow him to enter temptation without becoming a victim to it, and that his father-in-law was not a proper associate to become his guide.

The baneful presence of Mr. Grey, and the evil sway he gradually exerted over Selby, soon decided the question, and ere long the publishing firm saw very little of

their junior partner, and the gambling houses and clubs began to see a great deal of him.

Of course, the alteration in her husband's mode of life did not escape Minna's observation, especially as his absence from home in the evenings became more and more frequent, and the evidences of his dissipation became more apparent. She knew but too well the cause of the change, and almost cursed her father for having come between her and her happiness. She began to realize now why misfortune had overtaken her old home, and more than suspected that her father's own evil habits had been the means of his ruin, instead of the business losses which had always been represented to her as the cause.

She trembled therefore for her husband, and more than once besought him not to leave her in the evenings.

"Oh! George," she would say, "you are now so seldom with me. I see so little of you, and it is so lonely here without you. Do stay with me."

But he would put her aside with some frivolous excuse, and even on one occasion answered her impatiently, telling her that no husband was expected to be at his wife's apron's strings all the time.

They were the first unkind words ever uttered by Selby to her, and she felt them deeply. But she had her mother's courage, if she had not her patience, and so she resolved to bear up, and tried in every way to appear cheerful when she was sad, and to never complain when she had the utmost difficulty in restraining her reproaches. One morning, however, she gave way to her feelings, and spoke to Selby very plainly. She reminded him that he was breaking every promise he had ever made to her; that he was leaving her, a young

wife, alone and unprotected, by ceasing to take any interest in her. She recalled to his mind the cruel injustice she had suffered as a daughter, and how she had looked forward to different treatment as his wife, only to experience a bitter disappointment. She warned him that he was treading on dangerous ground in thus neglecting her, and asked him what his father and mother would think of his conduct if they were alive.

The moment for this outburst on the part of Minna was unfortunately ill-chosen, but her impulsive nature overcame her, and she could not prevent the outpouring of her over-charged feelings. Selby had been very much under the influence of liquor the night before, when he came home, so much so, that he had created in the mind of his wife, who saw him in that state, a sensation of momentary disgust. She had frequently observed him slightly elated by drink, but not thoroughly intoxicated until the present occasion, and she was, therefore, dreadfully shocked at the sight. Selby was not in the best of humors, therefore, when Minna spoke so plainly to him in the morning, and, for the first time in his life he answered her roughly, telling her that she was always complaining when she had nothing to complain about; that she had every comfort a woman could desire, and what more did she want?"

"I want," she replied, as calmly as her outraged feelings would permit, "the sympathy and the protection of my husband."

"Protection!" exclaimed Selby—"protection! from what?"

"George," said Minna earnestly, "you do not understand me. Do you suppose that I value the comforts, the luxuries that surround me in comparison to the

companionship, the love and sympathy of my husband? You would have me think that I am merely a purchased bauble, bought with the price of a fine house, expensive clothes, servants, carriages, and all the attendant luxuries of a luxurious home. You would have me imagine that I could be so mean-spirited, so base, as to be satisfied with that as a return for being your wife. Do you mean to say, that you think I married you for that? that I have no higher pride? Oh! George, you cannot surely regard my love so lightly."

"What nonsense you are talking," said Selby; "you know very well, Minna, I am not such a low cad as to think anything of the sort; but just because I happen to have been enjoying myself a little, like any other man would sometimes, you upbraid me and make me out almost a monster."

"Oh! no, George, I do not, indeed; but you know very well you have left me alone very much lately. We used to spend such pleasant evenings together, but now I seldom see you. You asked me what protection I required. I will answer you. I am a young wife; my only thoughts are for you, my husband; if you neglect me as you are doing, I will begin to think you spurn my love. I want you to protect me against any such feeling. I have no one to love but you, George; do not throw me aside. Oh! save me from becoming a careless, disappointed woman. It must be dreadful for a wife to have her love rejected, to feel that she has no one to go to for sympathy—for a little tenderness. Who have I to go to but you, George?"

"Minna, my dear," said Selby, quite softened by the evident distress of his wife, "you are exciting

yourself without any reason. What has put it into your head that my love for you has cooled? I dare say, I have not been at home as much as I ought to have been lately; but, little wife, you are dearer than ever to me. No one can ever come between you and me. But, you know, one has to go out a little sometimes with other men. Now, kiss me, my dear, and say you forgive me if I spoke in any way harshly to you."

Minna threw her arms at once round her husband's neck, and kissed him passionately. "If you only knew how I miss you, George," she said, "you would not leave me so much alone. I value one word of kindness, one little act of attention from you, my dear husband, more than the whole wealth of the world."

She had not mentioned her father's name; but a few evenings later, when Selby had announced his intention of remaining at home, she proposed a stroll through the grove, and there, when seated in the very spot where she had promised to be his wife, she turned to her husband and said, "How long does my father intend to remain at the 'Oaks,' George?"

"I do not know, Minna," Selby replied. "Of course I never have put the question to him. He is welcome to stay, however, as long as he wishes to do so."

"I would be very glad if he would go away," said Minna, impulsively, "I wish he had never came."

"Well! well! my dear wife, you are not very complimentary to your father. I always thought you a very dutiful daughter. What has he been doing to cause your displeasure?"

"I may as well speak plainly, George. His visit to San Francisco has done him a great deal of harm. I do

not think he is a good companion for you, my husband; it is very painful for me to say so, but I blame him for any unhappiness we have had. I feel that I must choose between my father and my husband. My father must leave here—I intend to tell him so. I will never be happy while he is with us. Please, George, let me have my way in this. He will perfectly understand that it is my wish, not yours, that he should go."

"It places me in a very uncomfortable position with Grey, my dear," said Selby. "I would much rather you would not press it just now."

But Minna reasoned with her husband, and spoke so pleadingly of the unhappiness her father's presence was causing her, that he finally, although very reluctantly, consented to allow her to speak to Mr. Grey on the subject.

Minna, while she regretted having to take the step she meditated towards her father, at the same time felt convinced that it would be the means of removing temptation from her husband's path, as she fully expected that Mr. Grey would leave New York city on receiving his dismissal from the "Oaks." Strong in this faith, she took the very first opportunity of putting her plan into execution.

One afternoon, therefore, as Mr. Grey, who had remained at the "Oaks" instead of going to the city, was sitting in the library reading, his daughter entered the room.

"Father," she said, "I have been wishing for an opportunity to speak to you during the last few days. Can you spare me a few moments now?"

"Certainly, Minna; nothing serious I hope."

"Something which I consider very serious, father."

"Indeed!" replied Mr. Grey, "then I am all attention."

"How long do you intend to remain a visitor at the 'Oaks?'" asked Minna abruptly.

The question was so unexpected that, notwithstanding Mr. Grey's customary coolness, he felt confused as he replied: "Well! really I have not given the matter a thought. I have not formed any plans yet. But why do you ask?"

"Because," said Minna, "I think it will be better if you can make arrangements to stay somewhere else."

Mr. Grey was fairly staggered at his daughter's words. He looked up at her face and saw that it was very white, but there was also a very determined expression in her eyes.

"What is it? what is the matter?" he stammered; "have you grown tired of me so soon?"

"Very tired," said Minna; "I wish you had never come."

"Well, by Jove!" replied Mr. Grey, resuming his usual cool manner, "you are a devilish hospitable sort of woman to speak to a guest in this way, more particularly when that guest is your own father. Pray, what is your reason?"

"I am very sorry, indeed, father, to be obliged to say what I have done; but I am quite in earnest."

"I have no doubt you are; but you have not stated the reason. What crime have I committed? What serious wrong-doing have I been guilty of to call down upon me your displeasure?"

"Shall I speak plainly, father? or would it not be better for us to separate without any hard words passing between us?"

"Well! let me see. You tell me to leave your house at short notice. I rather think it would be better to let me know why I am treated like a common tramp. I think it would be more satisfactory—to me,"

"Then, father," said Minna firmly, "it is because you are destroying my happiness. You have come between me and my husband; you have enticed him to neglect his home for other pleasures. If you remain here you will ruin him—and me."

"And pray, what has put this absurd nonsense into your head?"

"Absurd nonsense!" exclaimed Minna, now fully roused; "do you suppose that I am blind—that I am an idiot not to have seen what has been going on ever since you came? My husband before your arrival attended strictly to his business. Does he do that now? He never came home intoxicated to break my peace of mind. How often since you came has he been under the influence of wine? Does he spend his evenings with me as he used to do before you became our guest? Is he the same happy, cheerful man he was ere you appeared to lead him astray? Is it not very strange that ever since you entered this house my husband has been going to the bad? Who then is to blame if not you?"

"I should say, taking everything into consideration," replied Mr. Grey, coolly, "that George Selby is responsible for his own actions. He is not quite a baby."

"No," said Minna, "he is not a baby, although in your hands he may be weak as one. He is noble, generous and warm-hearted, too ready to trust those whom he regards as friends. In the hands of a cold, calculating man like you, he may, indeed, be a baby."

Mr. Grey laughed aloud. "By Jove!" he said, "I

wish Selby only heard you. He'd be delighted, I am sure."

"Father," cried Minna, her face white with suppressed emotion, "do not madden me. I know you are cruel, but spare me from your cruelty now. You have done enough mischief already. Either you will leave this house to-night, or I will."

"You are certainly a very dutiful daughter," remarked Mr. Grey in a mocking tone.

"I tried to be a dutiful daughter to you. I intend to be a dutiful wife now. It is my wish that you do not remain longer in this house; my husband will grant me my wish if I ask him."

"And so you wish to turn your father from your doors. I suppose this is in accordance with your mother's teachings. I certainly thought you had been taught differently from that."

"Oh! father," cried Minna, "why are you so cruel? Why will you always insult the memory of poor mother, who was ever good and patient towards you? Do you think I suffer no pain in speaking to you as I have done? Do you suppose I have no feeling of regret at parting with you, my father, in this way? Give me only a pledge that you will not again seek to lead George astray, that you will not come between him and me, and no daughter will be prouder or happier in having her father near her than I will be."

"I certainly must say," replied Mr. Grey, "that you have surprised me; you have been very plain-spoken indeed. I will never forget it as long as I live. I will never forgive you for it. I will go and pack my things at once; perhaps you will permit Tim to drive me to the city. I will acquaint Selby that you have kicked me

out of the house," saying which he strode out of the room, leaving Minna overwhelmed at what she had done.

For many minutes she sat in the library thinking over the events of the last half hour; then she rose, saying:—

"It is all for the best; but I am sorry I was obliged to do it."

When Richard Grey reached the city he went direct to George Selby, and said to him in a joking manner:—

"I say, Selby, I have just received my walking-ticket from your house. I am once more, as you see me, homeless and a wanderer. But, by George! Minna gave me a raking over on your account."

"I am sorry for it, old man," replied Selby; "but the fact is, my wife thinks that you and I are too thick together for my good. Women are queer creatures; once they get a thing into their head you cannot reason with them. I saw the other day that you'd have to go, or else there would be war. But I say, Grey, you and I need not be bad friends over it. I hope you did not quarrel with Minna."

"Well, we had pretty high words, and I don't think you'll ever see me inside your doors again."

"By Jove! I'm sorry; I feel very uncomfortable about it; never had a fellow turned out of my house in that way before; but say, Grey, what was the use of my interfering? it would have made it very unpleasant all around, and I was in hopes you and she would patch it up between you; but you haven't, and it's altogether deuced unpleasant—what's to be done?"

"Oh! never mind me, Selby. Of course, it's devilish unpleasant to be turned out by one's own daughter; but

I don't blame you; and she'll feel sorry for what she has done, when she comes to think over it. I'll take rooms somewhere."

Mr. Grey, then induced Selby to leave the office and accompany him to a favorite resort, where they sat chatting and drinking together for some time. Minna had not succeeded in separating her husband altogether from the influence of his father-in-law.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE time had come for Mrs. Rolph to carry out her scheme of revenge on Selby, and she resolved to take advantage of the opportunity offered her. Rufus Holt, who had continued to be a constant visitor at the "Oaks," was, of course, aware of Selby's dissipation, and of the neglect shown by him towards his young wife. These facts he had communicated to Mrs. Rolph, who thereupon urged him to be more than ever attentive to Minna. While Mr. Grey had been a guest at the "Oaks," the widow, for reasons best known to herself, had abstained from visiting there; but the moment she heard that he had left under peculiar circumstances (a fact which Holt had found out in some way), she decided upon making an effort to cultivate Minna's friendship. Accordingly she called at the "Oaks," and made herself very agreeable to its young mistress; and by repeated visits and taking advantage of every opportunity to show a desire to be friendly, she finally worked her way into a place in Minna's confidence. Then she made good use of the advantage she had gained until she and Minna became almost inseparable. Had Selby not been under the influence of his dissipated habits, he would have prevented this intimacy between his wife and Mrs. Rolph; but alas! the dismissal of Mr. Grey from the "Oaks" had only caused the temporary cessation of his gambling and

drinking propensities; and in a short time after her father's departure from the house, Minna discovered that her husband had resumed his unfortunate habits of intemperance. Hardly an evening passed now that she did not miss him from her side, and in his place Rufus Holt too frequently found it convenient to be present. Minna, perfectly innocent herself, never dreamed that she was doing wrong in allowing these constant visits of her husband's friend to take place; but there were those who observed and commented on them to her disadvantage.

Rufus Holt had begun to entertain a passion for Minna, which, however, he took good care to conceal, as there was something in Minna's manner which told him that he would be committing a fatal error if he ever allowed the slightest familiarity to appear in his conduct towards her. He was, however, only awaiting his opportunity, which he felt confident would come, if Selby continued his present neglect of his young wife. Mrs. Rolph also, who knew Holt's failings, had warned him against approaching Minna in anything but a respectful manner, and he therefore had to be doubly careful in his conduct at the "Oaks."

Hardly a week passed now without Minna and the widow exchanging visits, and the latter made good use of the influence she had obtained over Selby's wife to establish herself on a friendly footing. It may appear strange to our readers that Mrs. Rolph, a woman whom Selby had warned Minna against before his marriage, should succeed in becoming so intimate as she did at the "Oaks;" but in order to account for it they must consider the circumstances of the case. In the first place, Selby was away a great deal from home, and Minna had

few opportunities to confide in him and ask his advice, therefore he was unaware of the extent to which the friendship between his wife and Mrs. Rolph had grown. In the next place, Minna felt so utterly alone in the misery of her position—she felt her husband's neglect so deeply that she was glad almost of any friend on whom to rely for comfort. It must also be remembered that she knew nothing actually wrong about the widow, although at first she had not entertained a favorable opinion of her, and consequently, when she found her extending the hand of kindness and comfort, she in her helplessness was glad to accept it, and to forget any feeling she might have cherished at one time against her, when it was unsupported by any evidence of wrong-doing. Mrs. Rolph was also shrewd enough to always have a good word to say in favor of Selby—she was ever ready to frame some excuse for his neglect, and to tender a hope that he would yet see the error of his ways and become like his old self. Minna felt grateful to her for these words of comfort, and they served more than anything else to cement her feeling of friendship towards the widow.

Richard Grey, of course, never visited the "Oaks," and Mrs. Rolph was therefore spared the unpleasantness of meeting him. She had met him, however, in New York, and when she had seen how changed he had become, how utterly fallen he was, and perceived the effects of dissipation which were evident in his personal appearance, she had given him to understand very plainly that there could be no renewal of their former intimacy, so far as she was concerned, and when she found that he and Selby were as thick together as ever, notwithstanding the quarrel that had taken place with Minna, and

the subsequent dismission of Grey from the "Oaks," she felt more convinced than ever that George Selby had been at the bottom of his father-in-law's ruin. She certainly was very far astray in her calculations, but she did not know the truth of the matter as we do, and she was only too ready to find an excuse for condemning Selby, whom she hated as much for his desertion of herself as for having caused, as she supposed, her separation from Grey.

One day, when Mrs. Rolph and Minna were sitting together at the "Oaks," and after the latter had been pouring her troubles into the willing ear of the former, the widow remarked that it would be a good idea to give Selby a fright in order to bring him to his senses.

"But," said Minna, "I would not like to do anything which might annoy George. I am in hopes that some day he will realize how much he is away from home, and how lonely I am, and when he does, he will abandon his present wild life. He has a good heart, Mrs. Rolph, only he is so easily led away."

"He might certainly be annoyed at first, if you did what I was going to propose; but I think it would lead him to consider the injustice he is doing to himself and you. I know he is good-hearted, but he is very thoughtless. He is kind to a fault, Mrs. Selby; he was the same when I knew him in St. Louis."

"He has often told me," rejoined Minna, "that other husbands leave their wives just as much as he does me, and that he is no worse than other men. Perhaps I am too exacting; but I do miss him so much in the evenings."

"Well! well! my dear, do not fret too much about it. He will get tired of his gay life, and then he'll be glad to come back to you."

"But do all husbands treat their wives in the way he says?" asked Minna.

"A great many do, Mrs. Selby, far too many, my dear; they are very attentive, very loving during courtship, but after marriage they too often forget their promise to love, protect and cherish. Many a husband has cause to regret in his after-life that he did not cherish the society of his wife during the first years of his married life, when she was tender, loving and trusting. Neglect will turn the best wife into a cold and careless woman."

"Oh! I hope I never will be like that," said Minna.

"I don't think you will, Mrs. Selby, for your husband will see the error of his ways ere that happens; only don't take things too much to heart. Now, do you know what I would do, if I were in your place."

"If you can tell me anything that will bring him back to me, do so," said Minna sadly, "and I will do it."

"Oh! it is only a very innocent trick I meant to propose. It was simply to keep out of his way for a day, and leave a note where he would be sure to observe it, saying that his neglect had driven you away from him. Then, when you had frightened him sufficiently, you could come out of your hiding-place, throw your arms round his neck, and he would be so glad to see you back, that he would forgive the practical joke. It would, however, set him thinking about his own conduct, and would be a good lesson for him."

"Oh! I never could do that. I could not run the risk. It might only sever us completely. Oh! no, Mrs. Rolph, I could not play that joke on my husband."

"Nonsense," said the widow, "you need not leave the house. When he finds that you never had any in-

tention of running away, he cannot possibly feel angry. Come, we'll compose the letter just for a little fun, and then we'll consider about sending it, after it is written."

Mrs. Rolph then turned the matter into a good joke, and laughingly persuaded Minna to sit down at her desk and write the following letter at her dictation :

"My dear Husband,

"I cannot bear your indifference and neglect any longer. I am so miserable and unhappy, that I often wish myself in my grave. I feel that you have ceased to love me. Why did you ever marry me, to cause me so much unhappiness? I am so lonely—a deserted wife—I cannot bear it. I have gone away to find a home elsewhere. I must have excitement to drown the pain I feel in my heart, I am going out to battle with the world. I prefer such a life to remaining here—my love spurned, my happiness destroyed. I am going away, a miserable woman. Good-by, George ; may God bless and make you a better man !

"Your loving but unloved wife,

"Minna."

"There," said Mrs. Rolph, "that is strong enough I think to frighten him."

Minna had written the letter, and signed her name to it mechanically ; but when the widow took it and read it aloud, she rose and said, very seriously :

"We will destroy that letter, Mrs. Rolph. I do not even like to think of it as a joke. I do not like deception, and this would be the most cruel deception I could practise on my husband."

"I think you are right, Mrs. Selby. It would not do. It was only an idea which entered my mind. No harm, however, has been done," and as she spoke she crumpled the paper in her hand.

"I feel quite sure you meant it for the best," replied Minna, "but I am glad you agree with me."

Mrs. Rolph now appeared to search for something, and presently said: "I must have left my handkerchief in the library; I will run and get it." Minna, who was standing opposite the widow, at once said: "Don't disturb yourself, Mrs. Rolph, I'll go and bring it," saying which she turned and left the room.

The moment Minna's back was turned the widow hastily slipped the crumpled letter into her bosom, and then, seizing a sheet of paper which had some lines written on it, she proceeded to tear it into minute fragments, which she allowed to drop into her lap.

"There!" she exclaimed, as Minna re-entered the room, "I have destroyed your letter," and she pointed to the fragments lying on her dress.

"Ah!" said Minna, "we ought to have burned it—I will do so yet;" and she knelt before Mrs. Rolph and gathered the tiny bits of paper in her hand, saying, as she did so, "I could not find your handkerchief. Are you sure you left it in the library?"

The widow rose from her chair, and disclosed the fact that she had been sitting on the missing article.

Minna carried the torn letter out of the room and burned it, being very careful to see that every bit was consumed. Mrs. Rolph's nervous fingers, however, had made it impossible to discern any of the writing, so minute were the fragments which Minna gathered and destroyed.

The widow now held in her possession the key to the plot against Selby's happiness, which she intended to put into execution at an early day; and so relentless was this cruel, vindictive woman, that she never hesitated to sacrifice the innocent young wife who trusted

and confided in her, so long as she could obtain her revenge on the husband.

When Mrs. Rolph had taken her departure, Minna sat for a long time thinking over the letter she had been induced to write, and she dwelt with great satisfaction on the thought of its having been destroyed. Little did she dream that it was being treasured by her late visitor as a weapon to be used against her—that it was to be the means of causing her untold misery in the future. Unsuspicious of any evil intent on the part of Mrs. Rolph, she still could not divest herself of the idea that the widow had acted very injudiciously in having persuaded her to write the letter at all, and she blamed herself for having written the words she had so unthinkingly done. She almost felt as if she had committed a great wrong against her husband; and so strong was this feeling in her mind, that she resolved to make another appeal to him, to win him back, if possible. She had lately begun to think that Selby did not love her; that he had become tired of her, and that she had not proved herself a suitable wife for him. She even thought that perhaps she was in some way the cause of driving him so much away from home; and yet she could not bring to mind any cause for such a state of affairs. She had endeavored to be patient with him, and in every way within her power had tried to make the "Oaks" attractive and pleasant for him.

She was still ruminating in this way when Selby made his appearance, having come home from the city earlier than usual.

"I am not going back, to-night, Minna," he said; "I am going to have one evening at home, my dear. I have been an awful truant lately; have I not, wifie?"

"Oh! George, I am so glad you are going to stay

with me. I am so lonely when you are not here." The tears filled her eyes as she spoke, but they were tears of gladness. Then, springing up from her seat, she threw her arms round her husband's neck and kissed him. "Now," she said, "I'll go and see that dinner is served at once, and then we will have such a nice, pleasant evening together. I have lots of news to tell you about all sorts of things;" and the young wife, happy as a child in anticipation of the pleasure she would enjoy that evening in her husband's society, hurried away to see that everything was carefully prepared for his comfort.

Once only the thought of the letter she had written at Mrs. Rolph's suggestion occurred to her as she flitted about attending to every little want of her husband; and as she caught him watching her movements with a pleased and happy expression, she felt like a guilty mortal, and blushed at the recollection of the words she had penned. But her unpleasant thoughts soon gave place to a feeling of happiness, as George Selby, after dinner, lovingly threw his arm around her waist, and proposed that they should go and have a quiet chat in the library while he enjoyed his evening smoke.

Minna was full of tender emotion. Her heart was full. Her husband had never appeared so dear to her as he did on that occasion. He was so gentle, so loving in his manner, that it seemed like a dream to her; she could hardly believe it real, so different was it from the lonely life she had been leading.

When Selby had settled himself in his big arm chair, and had lit his favorite pipe, Minna drew her work-table from the corner and prepared herself to enjoy a pleasant evening.

It was a break in the life of dissipation Selby was leading, and he enjoyed the quiet rest. He had not gone to such a length as to lose sight of the fact that he had neglected his young wife. He had suffered many qualms of conscience on that point, and now that he saw her so radiant and cheerful beside him, he too felt a degree of happiness which he had not felt for many a day.

Minna kept her husband interested and amused. She rattled away in all the exuberance of her spirits until she had Selby laughing heartily at her sallies of wit and humor. Sometimes it would be some ridiculous escapade of Tim Hucklebury's, who, notwithstanding his retired and quiet habits, would now and again get himself into trouble with the other servants, and frequently committed some odd pranks upon them out of revenge. Tim's especial horror was the cook, with whom he was continually in hot water, and on whom he loved to play practical jokes. Then Minna would relate some of her experience with the visitors at the "Oaks," and amongst other things mentioned the frequency of Holt's visits, which she was beginning to become tired of.

Selby, however, defended his friend, and Minna, not wishing that any unpleasant topic should be discussed, immediately said that of course she was ready to receive Holt as her husband's friend, but could not refrain from describing him as an idle good-for-nothing. She then spoke of Mrs. Rolph's intimacy at the "Oaks," but was rather surprised at Selby's warmth as he warned her against the widow. Holt, he said, was an angel in comparison to her, and he strongly advised her not to encourage her visits. Minna immediately thought of the letter Mrs. Rolph had dictated to her; and somehow she began to think that she had done wrong in countenanc-

ing the widow as much as she had. She immediately promised Selby to be more careful, and that she would in future discourage Mrs. Rolph's visits as much as possible, without showing her any rudeness.

And so the husband and wife passed the evening, chatting on various topics, some serious, others mirthful. To Minna it was such a bright change from her recent loneliness that she forgot her sorrow completely in her present happiness.

The evening succeeding the one we have described, Selby did not make his appearance, and Minna felt very much disappointed. Rufus Holt, however, presented himself, much to her annoyance, as she would have preferred being alone. She could not tell at first whether it was her disinclination for his society, or whether she had become prejudiced against him ; but it seemed to her that Holt's manner was not the same towards her. He was inclined to be more familiar in his conversation and conduct, so much so that she regarded him once or twice with surprise. The feeling probably of disappointment at her husband's absence, causing her to look less favorably on Holt's visit that evening, had something to do with prejudicing her against him, and prevented her from taking any notice of her visitor's familiarity until he gave an unmistakable proof of his intentions. She happened to drop the berlin wool with which she was working, and Holt, in handing it back to her, caught her hand and pressed it.

"Ah!" he said, "if I had only been fortunate enough to have won this prize!"

In a moment Minna sprang to her feet, and facing him, her eyes all aglow, her cheeks burning with the blush of indignation, and her hand pointing to the door,

"Mr. Holt," she said, "leave this room at once; you are a miserable coward and a scoundrel, to insult a woman when her husband is not here to chastise you. Don't say one word! Leave this instant, or I will call the servants to turn you out."

Holt had taken too much wine, and had not displayed his usual caution. His passion for Minna, so long kept under check, had in an unguarded moment displayed itself. It was not so much the words he had uttered, as the vile look of passion in his face, which aroused Minna so suddenly. To think that the man before her was a trusted friend of her husband, and that he had dared to insult her in the way he had done, she felt that she could strike him dead at her feet.

Holt tried to stammer out some excuse. He saw the error he had committed when it was too late.

But Minna, stamping her foot, only pointed once more to the door, and said, "I will give you one minute to leave the house, and if you are not gone in that time I will have you beaten, as you deserve, by the servants. Go, you vile scoundrel!"

Holt required no further bidding, but hastily left the room crestfallen, and cursing his own folly and imprudence; and when Minna heard the hall door close after him, she threw herself on the sofa, and burst into tears. Oh, how helpless she felt at that moment! how cruel she thought it was of her husband to leave her thus unprotected! She remained for hours waiting for Selby to come, but he was unusually late that night; and when, worn out from fatigue, and overcome by her feelings of indignation at the insult she had received, she retired to her couch, feeling more lonely and unhappy than ever—a sad change from the happiness of the previous night.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN Mrs. Rolph learned from Holt the fatal blunder he had committed at the "Oaks," she rated him soundly, and would not listen to his excuse, that he had acted under the influence of too much wine. "You are a conceited fool," she said passionately to him, "and you have probably ruined all my plans by your miserable foolishness. Do you suppose, Holt," she added, "that you are such a captivating mortal that every woman must bow down and worship you? Do you think that because you have succeeded in winning the love of one or two girls, that you can be successful whenever you wish? Are you such an ass as to believe, that because you have been able to take advantage of some who were simple enough to trust you, that you can conquer wherever you go? You must remember, Rufus Holt, there are women who can preserve their honor; who can fight for it to the death against such as you. Oh! my dear precious Holt, you must not think that we poor creatures are all simpletons. We may give way—we too often do give way to the dictates of love, be it right or be it wrong to do so—we too frequently do not stop to consider the consequences, but allow ourselves to be guided only by that power to love which the Almighty has planted in every woman's breast; but when you suppose that we can be persuaded to succumb to vile passion such as yours, you are a fool. Oh! I know you, Holt, very well, and now I

would advise you to keep out of Selby's way, for if he hears from his wife how you have insulted her, he will be apt to take your life."

Holt looked at the widow in surprise; to hear a woman whom he knew to be influenced by an easy code of morals, speak as she had done, was something he could not understand. It is true, Mrs. Rolph was not strict in her ideas of morality, and had been guilty of several indiscretions during her life; but there was a time when she had loved truly, only to suffer disappointment. It is held by some, that a woman can only love once; it seemed to be so in her case, for when she found herself deceived by the only man whom she ever loved, she became a heartless, calculating woman; she had married Mr. Rolph for his wealth, and since his death she had coquetted with many suitors for her hand. She had not been altogether discreet in her conduct, but she was a true woman of the world, and knew how to veil her indiscretions. She had indeed desired a union with Richard Grey, but she had not been actuated by love. It was a position in society which she had wished to secure for herself, and she felt great chagrin when Grey went altogether to the bad, as it was not the first time she had been disappointed in the same way. She had even hoped at one time of winning Selby, and felt extreme bitterness towards him when she thought of the position she might have occupied as mistress of the "Oaks."

Rufus Holt for a moment forgot himself in presence of his benefactress. "Well, by Jove!" he said, "it is certainly rich to hear you speak in this way; you are the last person I expected to hear preach a sermon on love. Surely you never experienced the tender passion."

"I have a good mind to serve you as Mrs. Selby did, and order you from my presence," said the widow; "but you are not worth the trouble; now listen to me. You are, as you know, indebted to me for a large amount, and I think I could punish you for using my name to obtain money on one occasion, but I will not press my advantage, on one condition: You must leave New York and return to St. Louis at once; and I will expect you to do just what I bid you when you are there. If you refuse, look at your position; you may go to Selby and tell him anything you wish about me; you have no proof to offer against me but your word; I am as apt to be believed as you are. Besides, you have committed a folly which places you at rather a disadvantage with Selby. Refuse to go on with the work I have for you to do, and I will not only stop your supplies, but I will take up that unfortunate case of using my name without my sanction. Now, Holt, since you have chosen to be a little refractory with me, I may as well let you know at once, that you are in my power."

Rufus Holt winced under Mrs. Rolph's threat. He saw too plainly how completely he was at the mercy of the woman before him. He answered, however, rather surlily: "You order me about like a mere machine. When I was in St. Louis I was shipped off to New York at a moment's notice; now, when I am comfortably settled here, I am told that I must go to St. Louis. What the deuce is your game, anyway?"

"You forget one thing, Holt," said the widow, "it will be dangerous for you to remain any longer in New York. You had better keep out of Selby's way, for some time at least. As for my game, as you choose to call it, you will know all about it when the proper time comes.

In the mean time, do you intend to go to St. Louis, as I wish?"

"I suppose I will have to go," said Holt, moodily.

"Then you had better leave New York as soon as possible. I will write you when you are in St. Louis, and you can be governed by my letters what to do there."

Rufus Holt would gladly have released himself from the thraldom of Mrs. Rolph, but he did not dare to take such a step, although, at the same time, he conceived a feeling of bitter hostility towards her. He, however, left New York the next day, and Selby was surprised at his sudden departure without saying good-by to him.

Minna had refrained from informing her husband of the insult offered her by Holt, from a desire not to cause him pain. He had so often defended Holt, and had seemed so anxious to have him as a visitor at the "Oaks," that she did not wish to appear to upbraid him for introducing such a friend into the house. Selby, therefore, remained in ignorance of Holt's duplicity to him, and did not learn for years of the treachery which his supposed friend had attempted towards him.

During all this time, Richard Grey had continued his course of dissipation in New York. He gradually sunk lower and lower in the scale of respectability, until even George Selby felt ashamed of his acquaintance. The truth is, he had become a perfect drag on his son-in-law, and appeared to have lost every particle of honor and pride which he had ever possessed. His intemperance had played fearful havoc with him, and caused him to resort to almost any act of meanness in order to obtain money to carry him on. His daughter Minna was unaware of the extent to which her father's debasement

had gone. She had relented towards him, and had endeavored on several occasions to become reconciled with him; but he had spurned her offers, and although, through the instrumentality of Tim, who still retained his affection for his old master, she had often succeeded in doing her father a service, in the way of replenishing his empty purse, she did not know that he was becoming so degraded as he was. Tim always managed to convey the money which Minna sent to her father, without allowing him to know the source from whence it came; and Mr. Grey, who was not very particular in such matters, gladly accepted the assistance without inquiring how Tim procured it. He had a feeling that Minna was the sender, but as he did not wish to acknowledge this fact, he quietly took the money without asking any questions about it. Tim, of course, was aware of Mr. Grey's condition, but he carefully withheld the knowledge from his mistress. No one had felt more grieved at the rupture between Minna and her father than he, and in his own peculiar way he had more than once tried to bring them together, but without success. Minna, when she found that her father's departure from the "Oaks" had not resulted in his leaving New York, and that it had caused no change in Selby's mode of life, regretted that she had quarrelled with him, and wished that she had not acted so harshly. She began to think that perhaps she might have exercised more control by keeping him at the "Oaks."

Selby, however, had become tired of Grey's importunities for money, and in consequence a split in their friendship had taken place. Grey, when this happened, began to go down hill very fast, until his son-in-law offered to advance him a sum of money if he would

leave New York, and not disgrace him altogether. Grey at first showed some feeling of indignation at Selby's offer, but it was short-lived. He saw plainly that his chances of obtaining further assistance from his son-in-law were very slim, and so he concluded to accept whatever he could get and leave New York.

He once more thought of Australia, and the chance of meeting Langton there, whom he felt sure he could yet force to disgorge a part, if not the whole of his money. He therefore told Selby that he would go to Australia, and the latter, glad to be able to place so long a distance between them, at once volunteered to furnish the necessary funds. And so it was arranged that Mr. Grey should once more become a wanderer; but ere he left New York, an incident occurred which not only hastened his departure, but also prevented him from ever returning to the United States.

He had never, it appears, abandoned the idea of obtaining possession of his daughter's jewels; but, since leaving the "Oaks," there had been no opportunity afforded him for putting his design into execution. Now, that he was about leaving New York to go to a distant country, he was more resolved than ever to secure the coveted treasure. He was sorely puzzled, however, to hit upon a plan by which he might be able to accomplish his object. He at one time thought of trying to get Tim to help him, but he felt that it would be not only useless, but dangerous to make the attempt. He did not like the idea of committing a regular burglary on his son-in-law's house. If he could only gain admission without having to break in, he would not hesitate to take the jewels. He even persuaded himself that he had a right to them, as they had belonged to his wife, overlooking

the fact that they had been Mrs. Grey's private property, and by her bequeathed to Minna. At last he remembered that when he was living at the "Oaks," Selby had given him a night-key to the hall-door, and he had never returned it. He lost no time in searching for this key, and found it in one of the pockets of his valise, where he had placed it on the day when he had left his daughter's house so hurriedly. He now could gain the desired admission to the house without any trouble, and while living there he had made himself perfectly conversant with its interior arrangements. He knew every passage, almost every room, and could find his way anywhere with ease, even in the dark. He had noted Minna's room particularly, and knew that the toilet table which contained the drawer in which the jewels were deposited, stood in a small ante-chamber adjoining. The only difficulty Mr. Grey foresaw was to get possession of the key to the drawers, as he could think of no way to secure it without the knowledge of his daughter, who wore it constantly attached to a chain round her neck.

He had examined the key carefully the day on which Minna had shown it to him, and observed that there was nothing very extraordinary about it. It evidently belonged to a lock of simple contrivance, and he had concluded at the time that Minna trusted more to the safety of the hiding-place, than to the security of the lock for the preservation of her jewels.

He therefore resolved to have recourse to pick-locks, and only awaited an opportunity when Selby would be absent from home, to put his plans into operation. He frequently met Tim, who never forgot to visit him and tell him any news about Minna. The faithful

lad remained staunch to his old master to the end, and would have done anything to save him from disgrace. He saw that Mr. Grey was sinking lower and lower every day, and observed with sorrow how he was avoided by people as he became shabbier and shabbier in appearance. It was a great heart-break to Tim to observe Minna's father in such a miserable condition, and as he knew not how to remedy the evil, he did the only thing in his power to show his attachment ; he went to see Mr. Grey regularly, in hopes of being useful to him in some way.

Richard Grey knew that Tim would post him about Selby's movements, and accordingly, one day the lad informed him that his master was going away to Chicago on business, and would not be back for a day or two. Only that morning Richard Grey had received the money from Selby which was to take him to Australia, so that it seemed as if fate was working in his favor. He determined to commit the robbery that night. He had no fear for the result. Minna, he was quite aware, would blame him for taking her jewels, but he was equally sure that once he had them in his possession and had sailed with them to Australia, that she would keep the secret within her own breast. Selby would never know it, and that was all Grey cared for. He never considered the pain he was about to cause his daughter. He never thought of her distress when she discovered the loss of her jewels. All he cared for was his own safety from punishment when the theft had been committed. It was, therefore, very important to him that Selby should be absent when he entered the " Oaks."

That evening, Richard Grey, having provided himself with a mask and a bunch of skeleton keys, went

out in the direction of the "Oaks," and having gained the shelter of the grove, he waited there patiently until the lights in the house were one by one extinguished. He knew the window of Minna's room, and observed that she was apparently the last person in the house to retire. For hours he waited, until he began to think that she intended to leave her light burning all night, in which case he would be obliged to abandon the attempt. At last the light went out, just as his patience was about exhausted, and the whole house was shrouded with darkness. Everything was still and quiet as he stole across the lawn in the shadow of the trees and approached the hall-door. He had procured a pair of boots with soft felt soles for the occasion, and, therefore, as he crept up the steps, his footsteps did not make the least sound. Cautiously he inserted the night-key, and turned the lock so carefully that not the slightest click was heard; then softly pushing the door open, he entered the hall. Closing the door as quietly as he had opened it, he next began to ascend the stairs. At every step he paused and listened, but the soft carpet aided him, and the stairway being firmly built, did not creak; and so he silently groped his way in the dark towards Minna's apartment. He had placed the mask on his face in case he might disturb his daughter. He thought, if detected in the act he was about to commit, he might be able to evade discovery by having his features concealed, and he trusted to his swiftness and knowledge of the house to escape capture.

The small ante-chamber in which the toilet-table stood, had a door leading into the passage, so that Mr. Grey was not obliged to enter Minna's bed-room to accomplish the robbery. When he reached Minna's room

he stood motionless, holding his breath and listening with his ear close to the door, to catch the slightest noise inside; but all was quiet within. The only fear Mr. Grey now had, was that of finding the door of the ante-chamber locked, which would oblige him to pass through Minna's room. But as he turned the handle, and gently pushed the door, he found that it gave way to the pressure, and the next moment he stood facing the table where the treasure lay, which he had coveted for so many years. For a moment he stood listening intently. He could faintly hear the regular breathing of his daughter Minna in the next room, sleeping peacefully, and unconscious of the great wrong that was about to be committed against her.

Then Mr. Grey stooped, and groping with his hands, he quietly lifted the drapery which hung in front of the table, and as he laid it back over the top in order to reach the drawer, he knocked over one of the small scent bottles. It was only a tiny affair that toppled over, but the noise it made sounded sharp and distinct in the extreme stillness of the room. Mr. Grey stood stock-still; it was a critical moment for him; but the sleeper in the next room had not been awakened, although she seemed to move uneasily in her sleep. Then all was quiet again, and Mr. Grey once more proceeded with his work. He found it very difficult working in the dark. He had to use the sense of feeling altogether; and having to act with so much care and caution, to prevent the least noise, it took some time ere he could select a key to open the lock. At last he felt the key turn and the drawer open. He had succeeded so far; but, in the excitement of the moment, he had neglected to be cautious, and the result was, that in pulling out the drawer he allowed it

to make a sharp grating noise, which awoke Minna. Mr. Grey grasped the casket containing the jewels, and then stood perfectly still, as he heard his daughter move.

"Is that you, George?" asked Minna; but she received no answer.

"I must have been dreaming," she said aloud, "or perhaps Fido has followed me to my room, and is in mischief. I will light the gas and see."

It was a terrible moment of suspense for Mr. Grey. The perspiration stood in beads upon his forehead;—he heard his daughter, who had jumped out of bed, moving about the next room.

"Fido! Fido!" she called, "oh! if I could only find a match I'd catch you."

Mr. Grey never moved. He hoped that Minna might not succeed in striking a light, and that she would return to her bed; but just at that moment he heard the hall-door open and shut; then the gas in the next room was suddenly lit. He made a rush for the door of the ante-chamber, and Minna, who perceived him, uttered a piercing scream. The next moment he felt himself in the strong grasp of a man at the landing of the stairway, whom he could not shake off, and when Minna, hearing the struggle, threw open her bed-room door, allowing the bright light to stream forth, Richard Grey found himself confronted by George Selby, who held him by the throat. Mr. Grey strove hard to throw Selby down the stairs, but the latter was too active and too strong for him. It was a hard struggle, and Selby found himself at a disadvantage in having to keep his footing on the stairs, while Grey stood over him on the landing, until Minna, forgetting the dishabille in which she appeared, came to his assistance, and with a quick nervous move-

ment pulled Mr. Grey back. Selby in a moment had his antagonist down, and tore the mask from his face.

"My God! is it possible," he exclaimed, as he recognized his father-in-law's features; "what has brought you here in this masquerade, Grey?"

"My father!" cried Minna, trembling from the excitement. "Oh! George, spare him."

Selby was still holding Grey down when Minna spoke, but he at once released him.

Richard Grey rose slowly to his feet, muttering as he adjusted his neck-tie, "you squeeze hard, Selby. I—I—only wanted to see Minna before I went away."

Minna, however, who had slipped back into her room the moment she saw her father released by Selby, guessed at once the motive for his untimely visit. When she perceived her toilet-table deranged, and the jewel drawer empty, she knew why her father had stolen into the house like a common thief.

It was a dreadful blow to her, but then came the thought—what would she do? would she relinquish her mother's jewels, and save her father from a lasting disgrace.

Grey had concealed the casket in his breast pocket, and Selby was unaware of the theft he had committed. Minna had been quick to perceive this, and now the question presented itself—would she demand her jewels back? If she allowed her father to carry them out of the house she knew that she would never see them again. If she demanded them back before her husband, she did not know how he might act under the circumstances; at least he could not but regard Mr. Grey as a thief. As she hastily dressed herself, these thoughts occupied her mind, and as she emerged once more from

her room she had decided to sacrifice her jewels and save her father.

Selby, in the mean time, had been questioning Grey, and did not feel at all satisfied with his answers; but for Minna's sake he determined not to punish him. He knew well enough that Grey had entered the house for some evil purpose, though he could not imagine what it was. For his wife's sake he decided to let him go unpunished; but he made a stipulation in the following words: "Grey," he said, "you have not told me the truth. You came here like a common burglar, and as such I could cause your arrest. I do not wish, however, to bring disgrace on you and on myself; but I gave you money this morning to go to Australia; your ship leaves in the morning—go, and if you ever return I will have you arrested."

Minna by this time appeared. She had been weeping, and looked with pity on her father as he stood there a wreck of his former self. Her heart was full as she said, "Father, you are going away, George told me to-day, and I did want to see you before you went. Won't you forgive me? Let us be reconciled; let us be friends before we part. We may never see each other on earth."

Grey, glad of an opportunity to escape under some favorable circumstances, at once held out his hand. "Good-by, Minna," he said, "we have both been to blame. I forgive you and hope you'll forgive me."

Minna threw her arms round his neck and kissed him. It was the only pure kiss he had received for many a day.

Did it touch his heart? Yes, for a moment, this cruel selfish man felt one thrill of tender emotion; the next he became as hardened as ever, as the thought of securing the jewels occurred to him.

"Good-by, Selby," he said, "we will never meet again. I am sorry I have given you so much trouble. Good-by;" and shaking hands with his son-in-law and with Minna he descended the stairs accompanied by Selby.

As the latter stood on the door step, he said, "I'll rouse Tim and send him in with you."

"No," said Grey, "bid him good-by for me. I can walk. Here is your night key which you gave me when I was living here, I used it to-night to get in, I won't require it any longer," saying which he handed his son-in-law the key and passed out into the darkness. Selby never saw him again.

In order to account for Selby's unexpected return to the "Oaks," we may state that having met some friends in the city, he had been induced to accompany them on a visit to the house of a mutual acquaintance, where he had remained so long that he had missed the train, and so was obliged to postpone his contemplated visit until the following day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MINNA had shown her mother's jewels to Selby on one occasion, shortly after their marriage, but as she had never worn them since that time he did not miss them. He never even thought of inquiring about them; all he knew was that she kept them in the drawer of her toilet table, which she had planned purposely for their safe keeping. He, therefore, never learned till long afterwards that Mr. Grey had taken them away with him to Australia, for Minna did not tell him of her loss, and how cruelly she had been robbed by her father, until the time came when she was obliged to do so in self-defence.

The trials which Minna had undergone, the unhappiness she felt at her husband's neglect, now began to affect her health, and Selby, who observed how thin and pale she had become, knew very well that he was the cause. For a time the change in Minna's appearance touched his heart, and had the effect of making him more attentive and thoughtful in his conduct; but as soon as he saw the bloom re-appear on her cheek, and her spirits revive, he allowed himself once more to be drawn away by his dissolute associates. For a whole week he was very little at the "Oaks," having met some of his old companions from St. Louis, with whom he engaged in a regular round of dissipation, and during that

time he seldom or never went home till two or three o'clock in the morning. While matters were in this state there was one person who did not fail to observe the progress of events in Selby's home. Mrs. Rolph, who although not so intimate at the "Oaks" as she had been, still managed, by occasional visits, to keep herself informed of Selby's movements. One day, soon after the week's dissipation which we have already referred to, Selby announced his intention of leaving home on business which might detain him away some ten or fifteen days, and Mrs. Rolph, who happened to call immediately afterwards, learned from Minna the particulars of his intended trip, and also that he proposed taking Tim with him. It was important information to the widow, who had been patiently waiting for just such an opportunity to put certain plans of hers into operation.

When Rufus Holt had fallen into disgrace with Minna, Mrs. Rolph had sent him off to St. Louis, in order that his usefulness to her might not be destroyed. She had sufficient knowledge of Minna's character to believe that she would not say anything to her husband about Holt's conduct unless he should repeat it. But Mrs. Rolph did not wish Selby to know that Holt was exiled from the "Oaks," which he would do if that gentleman remained in New York without visiting Minna as usual. It was necessary to the success of the widow's plans that there should not appear to be any quarrel between Minna and Rufus Holt, and this was one reason why the latter was obliged to leave for St. Louis at such short notice. We will see presently how Mrs. Rolph made use of Holt in his exile to further her own vindictive and cruel schemes.

On the day of her visit to Minna, when she was

informed of Selby's proposed business trip, she immediately returned home and wrote Rufus Holt a very long letter, containing certain instructions for him to follow, and on the day of Selby's departure she despatched a telegram to him, worded as follows :—

"*S. has just left. Post letter according to my directions.*

"A. ROLPH."

Selby had never been absent at a distance from home for any length of time, and as he expected to be away a couple of weeks, perhaps longer, Minna felt the separation very much, even though she saw so little of him when he was at home. He had promised to write often, but for several days she did not receive a line from him. On the fourth day, however, the mail brought a letter in his handwriting, with the Chicago postmark, and dated from that city. It read as follows :—

"MY DEAR MINNA,

"Do not be alarmed. I have met with a severe accident and am laid up here. I wish you could come and nurse me. I have only Tim, who is very attentive, and though I am in a private house and the people are very kind to me, I miss your dear presence. Holt, who is here, has been most attentive and kind to me. I would send Tim to bring you here only I cannot spare him; but you will be perfectly safe travelling alone, and I will send Tim, or ask Holt to watch every train until you come. If you should not see Tim or Holt when you arrive, go to the Sherman House, and I will send there for you. I cannot write more as I am rather weak, but do not delay coming at once.

"Your loving husband,

"GEORGE."

Minna, when she read the above letter, became quite excited and eager to join her husband. She imagined him suffering with no tender hand to soothe the pain. She almost blamed herself for not being with him. She had felt a little piqued at his silence, but now that she knew the reason, she regretted her impatience.

In making her hasty preparations for departure she wished for some one to advise and assist her, as she had only the servants to rely upon. It was therefore with unfeigned pleasure that she received a visit from Mrs. Rolph that day. She was in the midst of packing when the widow called, who appeared to be quite surprised at the preparations for travelling which she saw going on.

"Oh! Mrs. Rolph," said Minna, "I am so glad you have come. I have received very sad news indeed. George has met with some accident, and is lying helpless in Chicago; I am going to join him. I am so glad you have come, for I am sure you will assist me. Will you not?"

"I am very sorry to hear of Mr. Selby's misfortune, indeed," was the reply, "and I will only be too happy to stay and help you. When do you go?"

"Oh!" said Minna, "I wish to leave at once—I must not delay a moment. I will not feel easy till I am beside him—poor George! Now, Mrs. Rolph, come and help me, won't you? I am so anxious to get away."

"I am very glad I came," said the widow; "it will not take very long to get ready, and then you can drive into town with me in my carriage."

"Oh! thank you," said Minna; "I am so glad—so much obliged to you."

Mrs. Rolph's assistance proved of great service in enabling Minna to complete her packing without delay,

who, towards the end, handed her husband's letter to the widow to read.

The latter when she had finished reading it, said, "You ought to take it with you. I will place it here where you can find it;" and she held out a travelling satchel which she had been in the act of arranging when Minna handed her the letter.

"Oh! yes! thank you; of course I wish to take the letter with me," replied Minna. "Is it not strange that George does not say anything about his accident, how it happened, and if it is very serious? I suppose, though, the poor fellow was so weak he could not write about it; or did not wish to pain me."

"It is strange," remarked Mrs. Rolph, "that he does not say something more definite about it;" and she proceeded with the arrangement of the satchel.

Minna never gave another thought to her letter, as she turned away to attend to some other matters, until afterwards, when she was sitting alone in the Pullman car, she searched for it to read it once more, and then she discovered to her astonishment that it had disappeared. Had Mrs. Rolph forgotten to place it in the satchel? or had it been lost in the hurry of departure? However it happened, Minna Selby never saw her husband's letter again.

The day after Minna's departure for Chicago, Mrs. Rolph suddenly took it into her head to start on a tour of travel for pleasure.

When Minna arrived at Chicago and stepped upon the platform of the depot, she looked around to see whether Tim was in sight. She could not bear the idea of meeting Holt, and therefore hoped that he would not be sent to meet her. But neither Tim nor Holt ap-

peared, and Minna was beginning to feel anxious when a stranger, evidently a hackman, stepped towards her and asked, "Are you Mrs. Selby?" "Yes," said Minna.

"I was told to come here and fetch you," said the man. "I thought it was you by what they told me. If you will give me your checks I'll get your luggage. This way, ma'am." Minna was bewildered by the number of strangers around her, and the noise of incoming and outgoing trains. Evidently the man had been sent for her, because he knew her name and must have been informed concerning her personal appearance. What could she do? Mechanically she handed out her checks, and then followed her conductor, who, taking her satchel, led the way to a hack standing at one of the doors of the depot, and into which he handed her. He then went away to procure her trunks, while she sat in the carriage looking out of the window in the hope of yet seeing Tim make his appearance. Little did she imagine that Holt was watching her from the corner of one of the arches; but so carefully did he keep himself concealed, that she did not catch a glimpse of him.

When the hackman had placed the trunks on the carriage he drove off, and Minna, being perfectly unacquainted with Chicago, had no idea of the direction he was taking. She began at last to feel uneasy at the great distance the hackman was driving her, and was just on the point of calling to him to ascertain where he was taking her, when he drove up in front of a large and elegant house.

The hackman immediately jumped down from his seat and opened the door.

"Here is the house, ma'am; if you'll step in I'll bring your trunks along after you."

"But I do not even know who lives here. What is the name of the lady? I expected to have met someone who would have introduced me."

"I don't know anything about that, ma'am. I was sent for you, and told what like you was. I've brought you all safe. It's Mrs. Leech as lives here."

At that moment the hall-door opened, and a handsomely dressed woman appeared, who, running down the steps, said :—"You are Mrs. Selby—come right in—we have been expecting you."

"Are you Mrs. Leech?" asked Minna; "if so, do tell me how my husband is. I am so anxious to know."

"Your husband will be all right very soon, Mrs. Selby; but come in. I will show you to your room, where I am sure you will be glad to change your clothes."

Minna accompanied the lady up the steps, but as she did so, she said, "Oh! I would much rather see my husband first; I can dress afterwards. Please take me to him."

"It is impossible," said Mrs. Leech, "he is asleep, and the doctors say that if he is disturbed before a certain hour it will be dangerous for him."

Minna looked very much disappointed, but she said nothing more, only followed the lady of the house up stairs, until she was shown into a sumptuously furnished bed-room.

"Now," said Mrs. Leech, "you can dress and rest a while. I will send your trunks up at once. Make yourself quite at home."

"Thank you, Mrs. Leech," replied Minna; "but I wish you would let me know the moment I can go to Mr. Selby. I cannot rest until I see him."

"Certainly I will," answered Mrs. Leech; "and now

I will go and send you some refreshment, for I am sure you are hungry as well as tired," saying which she left the room, and Minna sat down to ponder over the events of the past two days before even removing her hat.

She wondered how her husband happened to be in Mrs. Leech's house instead of a hotel, especially when she did not remember ever hearing him mention her name. She did not altogether like the appearance of her hostess. There was something very unladylike about her in the first place, and in the next she had a brazen look in her face very repellant to Minna. But the thought of Mrs. Leech's kindness to Selby made her inclined to overlook any shortcomings in that lady, and to blame herself for ingratitude.

She had not commenced to remove her travelling dress, when a servant brought in a tray containing wine and cake.

Minna, however, drank very sparingly of the former, and ate only a small biscuit. She could not eat; her thoughts were too full of her sick husband, and her desire to be by his side. She began dressing, however, in order to appear as attractive as possible in the sick room, when the time came for her to be there. She had just finished, and was sitting down at the window to rest when there came a rap upon the door. Minna instantly rose and opened it, supposing it to be Mrs. Leech come to fetch her to her husband.

Instead of that lady, Rufus Holt stood before her.

"Mr. Holt!" exclaimed Minna, involuntarily stepping back.

The next moment Holt had entered the room and shut the door behind him ere Minna could recover from her surprise.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" she demanded angrily, as she observed Holt standing with his back to the door as if to prevent her leaving the room.

Then she became frightened as she saw how flushed he was, and how his eyes gleamed from the evident effects of stimulants.

"Have you come here to insult me? What right have you to force yourself into a lady's chamber in this way?"

"I have something very important to say to you, Mrs. Selby," said Holt thickly.

"Is my bed-room the proper place in which to speak to me. I am afraid you have been drinking, Mr. Holt; you do not know what you are doing; pray leave the room at once, and I will meet you in Mrs. Leech's drawing-room."

"You ordered me away from your presence on a former occasion, Mrs. Selby; but now you are not in your own house, and your servants are not around you to do your bidding—will you please to remember that?" and Holt laughed brutally at her.

Minna's face became very pale. She looked around her to see whether there was a bell handle in the room, but she saw none; she retreated, however, a few steps from Holt as she replied, "I am certainly not at home, else you would not dare to speak to me as you have done, but have a care, Mr. Holt, you will not insult me with impunity."

"What makes you think I am going to insult you?" asked Holt, with a mocking smile on his features.

"You are insulting me by remaining in this room. If you have the least spark of manly feeling you will leave it at once," said Minna, excitedly.

"I do not intend to leave here, Mrs. Selby, until it suits me; so you may as well hear what I have to say quietly."

Minna now became thoroughly frightened. It was a mystery to her how Holt had been permitted by Mrs. Leech to take the liberty he had done. He must have imposed upon the lady of the house in some way; and now, taking advantage of her husband's illness, he had come to insult her, perhaps compromise her in the eyes of the world. She regarded the visit of Holt as a mean, petty act of revenge on his part. She did not credit him with any baser motive. She soon saw her mistake.

"Mrs. Selby," said Holt, taking a step forward, "you know very well that I love you. I have loved you passionately almost from the first day I saw you; but you spurned me—you threatened to have me kicked out of your house. Now you are in my power; you cannot escape me here. You supposed you were coming here to meet your husband. He is miles away, and by this time has cast you adrift as an abandoned woman. He thinks you have left him. You have no proof to offer him that you were decoyed away from him. He will not believe you, since your actions will appear stronger than words. Do you understand me?—you are completely in my power. Mrs. Leech is a friend of mine, not of your husband."

Minna stood before him; her hand pressed on her brow, her face deadly pale, and her eyes staring fixedly before her. She had heard every word Holt had uttered—they seemed to burn their way through her brain. She could not speak, but she tottered as if she were going to fall.

"And now," continued Holt, "you may as well make the best of a bad bargain. You are mine now, whether you like it or not."

"Never, you brute," said Minna in a low, firm tone; "I will kill myself first."

Holt laughed, as he took a step forward. "I swore you would be mine, and I'll keep my word."

Minna looked around for some weapon of defence while her persecutor sprang towards her.

Let us close this page, however, on the scene that followed.

A heart-rendering cry—a piercing scream—and then Holt, with scared face, sprang out of the room, and closed the door behind him with trembling fingers.

CHAPTER XXIV.

When Mrs. Rolph employed Holt to act as her confederate in carrying out her schemes against Selby, she knew that he was mean and contemptible; but she had not estimated his villany at its true value, as she afterwards found out to her regret. The widow, from the very first, had but one object in view—the separation of Selby from his wife, and in carrying out her plans she had not hesitated to sacrifice Minna's happiness in order to be revenged on her husband; but it had never entered into her calculations to utterly ruin one of her own sex in the way which Holt had contrived. She knew that her confederate was unprincipled—that he was a thorough libertine, and she was aware that he had on one occasion insulted Minna; but she thought that he was too great a coward to brave the fury of Selby by openly attempting any indignity on his wife. She had not allowed Holt to become aware of all her plans, and she had been very careful to warn him not to expose himself to the anger of Selby, by appearing to have anything to do with the abduction of Minna. All she required of him was to arrange matters so that Minna could be kept in concealment, a close prisoner, for a few weeks, without allowing her to know who was the cause of it, or who had effected it. She had even informed Holt that Selby would be kept in ignorance

of his complicity in the affair, although she really intended to let Selby suppose that Holt was the attraction which had induced Minna to desert her home. Mrs. Rolph did not care so very much about Holt's personal safety, but she wished to encourage him in the work she had for him to do by quieting any fears he might have of chastisement from Selby; and, besides, it did not suit her plans to allow the two men to meet, for some time at least. She had, therefore, arranged that Holt, when he had secured Minna, should leave the country on a pleasure trip, so as to keep him out of Selby's way.

The widow's plans were about as follows: She had awaited her opportunity to induce Minna to leave home, and she intended to make it appear to Selby that his wife had eloped to join a favored lover. She hoped, by keeping Minna concealed, and by preventing her husband from finding out in which direction she had gone, to cause a total separation of the pair. She knew very well that Selby would ascertain that Minna had driven off in her carriage from the "Oaks," and that he would come to her for information; but she determined to keep out of his way for several weeks at least. She was aware that Minna had not informed any of her servants as to where she had gone. If Tim had been at home, however, Mrs. Rolph might have been checkmated, but circumstances had worked wonderfully into her hands; she knew that Minna's supposed flight would be a dreadful blow to Selby, and that it would probably result in his leaving New York to hide his shame and to shun the disgrace. She was aware that her game was a desperate one to play, and that if she was discovered she would be placed in a very unenviable

position; but what will a revengeful woman not do to gain her object! She had laid her plans; she had carefully covered up her tracks, and she trusted somewhat to circumstances to favor her. There were only two things she feared, and these were, the chances of Holt betraying her, and of Minna having an opportunity to enter into explanations with Selby; but she determined to guard against them both. So far as Minna was concerned, she resolved to protect her from actual want—to provide for her in some way, if necessary, after she had effected her separation from her husband. She had no idea of actually ruining the young wife, although she had contrived to blast her reputation and destroy her peace of mind forever.

She had, however, miscalculated the part which Holt would take in the matter, when the opportunity was afforded him to gratify his base desires. When he understood from Mrs. Rolph that Minna was to be placed in his power, and that his share in her abduction would be concealed from Selby, he immediately went to work to accomplish the ruin of the innocent woman who had once resented his despicable advances. The fact that he was expected to leave the country, and to travel at the widow's expense, in order to be out of the way when Minna's abduction had been completed, only acted as an incentive for him to carry out his evil designs. It was therefore Holt's own contrivance, in which Mrs. Rolph had no part, to decoy Minna into a house where he calculated to effect his purpose.

Selby, in ignorance of the great misfortune which had befallen him, remained away from New York for over three weeks, accompanied by Tim, who thoroughly enjoyed the trip, and proved to be of great service to his

master. When they at last returned home, Selby sent Tim at once to the "Oaks," while he stopped on his way at the office, in order to procure any letters that might be lying there for him.

There were quite a number on his desk, and curiosity as to their contents led him to sit down and spend a few minutes scanning them before he drove home. He therefore hastily opened one envelope after another, merely glancing at the letters when he saw they were not of importance. At last his attention was riveted on one which gave him some uneasiness. It read as follows :

"MR. GEORGE SELBY :

"You have been playing the fool at home, and your wife has been making a fool of you. You have let another supplant you right before your eyes, and you have been so blind you have not seen it. You have left your wife to look after herself, and she has found one whom she likes better than you. This is sent you by a friend, to warn you. Keep your eyes open, and if you will be advised you will prevent Mr. Rufus Holt from dancing attendance on your wife when you are absent. His going away from New York is all a blind. Be careful. "A WELL-WISHER."

The above had been sent by Mrs. Rolph under a feigned hand. "Pshaw!" exclaimed Selby, after a moment's hesitation, as he tore the note into fragments, "I hate anonymous scribblers—the idea of Minna being false to me. I'd as soon think of cutting off my right arm as believe it. But the very next letter he opened made him start in his seat, and as he read it he turned pale, and his hands trembled so that he could hardly decipher the words before him. It was from Minna, saying that she had left home never to return ; that she had grown weary of his neglect and indifference. A postscript was

added, telling him to forget her, and not to attempt following her, as she would never return to live with him.

It was a dreadful shock to Selby, and, coming immediately after the anonymous letter, it came with twofold effect. For a few moments he sat like one in a dream —he could not realize it—he could not believe it—no! no! it was a vile forgery that lay before him. Again he looked at the letter—he scrutinized it closely; but, alas! he could not but acknowledge that it was indeed the handwriting of his wife; he could not be mistaken in the peculiar formation of some of her letters. The only thing at all doubtful was the postscript, the writing of which did not seem to be quite the same as that in the body of the note. If the letter was a forgery, it was a perfect one.

But, springing to his feet, he exclaimed, "I will soon know—I will soon know. I will see Minna and ask her if she can tell the meaning of all this. It is a vile plot by some one." Then the thought flashed across his mind as he rushed out of the office,—what if she should not be at the "Oaks"—if she had really gone! O, God! the thought was terrible.

It did not take Selby long to drive to the "Oaks," and at the lodge gate he met Tim, who said to him.

"The mistress went away, sir, nearly two weeks ago. You never told me, sir, she was going on a visit."

"Gone!" exclaimed Selby, "you mean to say that your mistress is not at home—has not been here for two weeks."

Tim looked at his master in surprise. He saw him turn very pale, and a distressed look pass across his face. The servant saw that something was wrong; he answered, "Yes, sir. so the servants say."

"It is very strange," said Selby; "but probably she has left a note for me saying where she had gone. Some friend has invited her to pay a visit in my absence. I will drive up to the house and see." Tim at once jumped in beside his master and they drove together up the avenue.

There was no note, however, from Minna, and the servants did not know where she had gone. She had left very suddenly, and had gone away in Mrs. Rolph's carriage; that was all they knew. Their mistress had not said anything more than that she would not be likely to return for some time, and had given them some hurried instructions as to what they were to do in looking after the house during her absence.

When Selby went to Minna's room he searched everywhere in the hope of finding some note addressed to him by her; but he could find nothing of the sort. His own letters, which he had written to her when he was away, lay unopened on her dressing table. He looked around him—the room looked so deserted—there were so many things to remind him of the absent one. Here were little trinkets which she prized so much; in one corner of the room lay a pair of tiny slippers belonging to her—on the walls were evidences of her handiwork in the shape of a few water-color sketches which she had painted of the "Oaks" and its vicinity. In her wardrobe were the dresses she wore, and at the head of the bed, on a little fancy table, lay her favorite bible, the gift of her mother, which she valued above all things else. Selby's heart was full as he stood alone in that room, where only a short time previous he had seen that dear, patient, loving face smiling on him, and which perhaps he never would behold again. His own neglect towards

her loomed up before his mind, and he bitterly upbraided himself for having treated her as he had done. Oh! how he wished that he could live the past few years of his life over again. How differently would he act towards his wife in that case—how considerate he would be towards her—how carefully would he guard her, and how fondly would he show his love! but now she had left him—gone away with another—never to return—never—and the strong man sank into a chair and sobbed like a child. As he grew calmer, a stern look stole across his face—he would be revenged on the man who had stolen his wife away from him. As for her, he pitied her; he could not throw her from his heart—he knew that he was greatly to blame, and that if he had acted more like a true husband—if he had not neglected her, she never would have been driven to take the course she had; but he could never take her back. She was lost to him forever. At that moment his eye was attracted by the toilet table in the adjoining room. Her mother's jewels—she had often told him that she would never take them with her on any trip, because she deemed them perfectly safe at the "Oaks,"—in the secret drawer where she had placed them—had she taken them with her? If she had, it would be a proof that she had indeed gone, not to return. He knew that Minna was proud, and that if she had left him she would not take with her any of his gifts; but her mother's jewels, she would certainly take them. He rose, and lifting the drapery of the table, found the drawer open and the jewels gone. Alas! his last hope was destroyed; he slowly left the room, and going to the library summoned Tim. The faithful servant was the only one Selby could consult in his distress, and from the great love Tim bore for his mistress, he hoped to gain from him some feeling of comfort under his great affliction.

When Tim entered the room, Selby said:

"Something very dreadful has happened, Tim, and I have called you in because you are the only one I can speak to about it for the present."

"Well, sir," replied Tim, twirling his hat in his hand and looking very seriously at his master. "It seems to me ever since those two men got drowned in the tank, that we've had nothing but dreadful things happening in the family."

Selby did not appear to notice Tim's remark, but he continued: "There has been some mischief going on here since we have been away. Your mistress has left here, and I fear she will never come back."

"Never come back, sir," exclaimed Tim. "Good G—d! what do you mean, Mr. Selby?"

"I mean," replied his master, "that she has gone away and left a letter saying that she will never return."

"I don't believe it, sir—I mean, you've been imposed upon," interrupted Tim—"it's all that Mrs. Rolph's doings, depend upon it. You remember, sir, I once told you to beware of her,—she's a deep one, and don't bear any good feeling for you, or I'm greatly mistaken."

"I wish I could only think as you do," said Selby, sadly; "but I know her handwriting too well. The letter which I received was written by your mistress, and in it she says she has left never to return."

"She went away with Mrs. Rolph, didn't she?" asked Tim; "well now, sir, in my opinion the first thing is to find that lady, and perhaps we'll get some information out of her."

"You are right," said his master, "I must go and see Mrs. Rolph without delay."

Selby never mentioned Rufus Holt's name to Tim, or his suspicions as to the part that gentleman had played in the flight of Minna; but a casual remark of Tim's arrested his attention.

"Mrs. Rolph and that chap who used to come here so much—Mr. Holt—they're a pair, sir; what mischief they can't do ain't worth doing."

"Mr. Holt was always welcome here, Tim. He was a friend of mine, you know. It was my wish that he should come here often."

"The more's the pity," replied Tim boldly; "he was treated well enough—better I guess than he deserved. I know my mistress hated him like poison; and 'twixt you and me, sir, I never said this before, but I kind o' think she gave him his walking ticket one day, for I saw him go out of the house, swearing away to himself like a trooper. I guess he made my mistress mad, sir, and it don't do sometimes to vex her."

These words were pleasing to the ears of Selby, who could have forgiven Minna for leaving him because he felt that he had been the cause of her unhappiness; but he never could entertain any idea of forgiveness if he found that she had fled to join a lover.

He, however, dismissed Holt from his mind until he could find out the truth from Mrs. Rolph, who he felt sure could give him some clue at least to work upon.

"We will go at once, and I will find out from Mrs. Rolph where your mistress went to. The whole affair is a mystery. Harness one of the horses at once, Tim, and we will drive into the city."

"Yes, sir, the sooner the better; but if Mrs. Rolph ain't at the bottom of all this trouble then I'll begin to think she's a pretty good sort of a woman, which I don't

at this present minute," saying which, Tim marched off to bring the horse and buggy round to the door.

Selby, accompanied by Tim, drove at once to the widow's house; but on reaching there, they were informed that she had been absent from home over two weeks, and was not expected back for a month or six weeks. When Selby inquired where she had gone to, he was told that she was travelling, and there was no certainty as to her movements.

Selby was greatly disappointed. He had hoped to learn something from Mrs. Rolph which would enable him to trace his wife's whereabouts. As he drove away he turned to Tim and said: "Well, what can be done now?"

"If you will drive home, sir, I'll go and make inquiries at the railway station, maybe I'll find out something. Don't take it too much to heart, sir. It will all come out right, sir. You and my mistress have been imposed on, sir. If I don't find out anything at the railway stations then we must go and find Mrs. Rolph, she's the only one who can give us any news."

"Very well," said Selby, "we will drive home, for I feel utterly exhausted." He spoke in a sad wearied tone, and Tim felt grieved for him.

The latter made careful inquiries, but he could not discover anything at the railway stations. Amongst the thousands who daily arrive and leave New York it was impossible that any of the officials would remember seeing Mrs. Selby. Tim therefore returned to his master very crestfallen.

"Well, Tim, any news?" asked Selby, eagerly.

"No, sir," replied Tim, "we must go and find Mrs. Rolph."

CHAPTER XXV.

We must now retrace our steps.

As Rufus Holt stood listening for a moment outside the door of Minna's room, he had a cowed look of guilt upon his face, and before he had time to leave the spot, a girl came rushing from one of the adjoining chambers and confronted him.

She was a very tall girl, and stout in proportion, with a broad honest-looking face. She was not beautiful, by any means, but there was something very pleasant and prepossessing about her features. Her mouth, which was rather large, showed off to advantage, when she smiled, the rows of white pearly teeth. She possessed large lustrous eyes, the sharp lightning glance of which was most effective when she was in a stormy mood, while they could be equally expressive indicators of the softest and most pleasurable emotions. Altogether she appeared to be a girl of no ordinary character.

She was known by her companions as the "Amazon," on account of her large size, and a habit she had of exerting her influence over others by muscular force. In the latter case she was not very particular whether it was a man or a woman on whom she was called upon to use her strong arms. Very few cared to oppose her will when she made up her mind to have her own way; but while her associates were afraid of her, they all had to

admit that she invariably took the side of the weak against the strong. Many a poor girl had she taken under her protection to save her from persecution and injustice. It seemed strange that a girl of her disposition should have been content to live the abandoned life she was doing ; but later on we will hear her own story how she came to be an inmate of Mrs. Leech's house.

She had heard Minna's scream, and, running out of her room, perceived Holt standing in the passage in the guilty attitude we have already noticed.

"What have you been up to ?" she asked, "and who is that woman you've got in there ? you've been abusing her. I know it by your look."

"It is none of your business what I have been doing, or who I have got in here. You can ask Mrs. Leech if you are very particular about knowing ;" and Holt made a movement to go away.

"None of my business, is it," cried the "Amazon," and the next moment she had clutched him by the collar and with a quick movement of her foot tripped him over on the floor. "I'll let you know whether it is my business," she exclaimed, as she held the prostrate man down by the throat."

"Unhand me, you devil," he hoarsely cried. "What do you mean ?"

"I mean to throw you down these stairs if you say another word," said the "Amazon." "You've been up to some dirty work, and I know it. Now get up and open that door."

Holt arose, looking as if he could kill the woman before him, but when he observed her kindling eyes, and having experienced her great strength, he thought discretion the better part of valor.

"How can I open the door," he said, "it is a slip lock and is fastened on the inside. I have no key."

At that moment the "Amazon" heard a moan within the room, and turning towards the door, she said, "Well, I'm going to break it in."

Holt, taking advantage of the opportunity, made his escape, as the strong girl, putting her shoulder to the door, forced it open,

What a sight presented itself to her view! Extended on the floor lay Minna, the crimson blood flowing from a wound in her head, which she had evidently received by striking the corner of the bed as she fell. Firmly clasped in her hand was a large toilet bottle, which she had probably seized to defend herself against Holt. She was moaning slightly, although perfectly unconscious, when the "Amazon" entered the room.

Gently the girl lifted the inanimate form in her strong arms, and laid it on the bed. Then she flew down the stairs to Mrs. Leech's room.

That lady was quietly enjoying a glass of champagne, which she sipped with evident satisfaction as she lolled back in her large arm chair, when the "Amazon" burst in upon her.

"Here, Mrs. Leech," cried the excited girl, "you've been up to some of your devil's work. Do you know that there's been a woman killed up in one of your rooms? If she's not dead she'll soon be; get up, and send for a doctor, if you don't want to be hauled up for murder."

To say that Mrs. Leech was startled, does not express the state of her feelings. She was terror-stricken. She knew at once to whom the "Amazon" alluded, and the utter ruin the affair would bring upon her and her

house came before her like a flash. She could not speak, but sat staring at the girl before her.

"Do you hear me?" repeated the "Amazon," "are you going to send for a doctor, or will I go and notify the police? You had better be quick, for I won't wait."

"Oh! I'll send at once," said the frightened woman, starting to her feet and shattering the champagne glass on the carpet in her excitement. "She won't die, will she? What has happened?"

"She'll die if you don't be quick," interrupted the girl. "Now, ask no questions but bounce as fast as you can. I'll go up and see what I can do for the poor thing till the doctor comes."

Mrs. Leech required no further bidding, but hastened from the room to send off a messenger for medical assistance, while the "Amazon" returned to Minna's room.

The latter at once set to work to bathe the blood which had trickled down over Minna's face and neck. Tenderly she lifted the fair white face, and no mother could have been more gentle than she, as she smoothed the pillows and arranged the bed to make it as comfortable as possible.

When the doctor came he dressed the wound on Minna's head, and then ordered her to be undressed and kept as quiet as possible. He said that she was not to be left alone a moment, as she required the utmost care, and it was difficult for him to say whether her condition was dangerous or not. He very much feared that it would result in brain fever; but he would be better able to tell when he returned, which he would do that evening.

The "Amazon" at once volunteered to remain with

Minna, and gave Mrs. Leech to understand very plainly that no one was to interfere with her in the task she had undertaken. When she required any one to relieve her, she would ask the doctor to procure some one.

The doctor was rather surprised to find a lady of Minna's evident refinement in Mrs. Leech's house; but as the latter lady managed to give a very plausible excuse for Minna's appearance there, as well as the cause of the accident, he went away satisfied.

When the doctor returned in the evening Minna had become slightly delirious, and he then stated that she would probably be confined to her bed for weeks. The delirium might last for several days, perhaps longer; he could not tell, as it depended very much on the state of the patient's mind when she received the blow as well as the strength of her constitution.

"Could she be removed from here?" asked Mrs. Leech.

"It would be very dangerous at present," said the doctor.

Here the "Amazon" spoke up. "She will stay right here, Mrs. Leech, and she'll want for nothing—do you understand? Now, you just leave the room," and she opened the door. The landlady, who stood in dread of the girl, at once took her departure, although with very bad grace at the unceremonious way in which she had been dismissed.

The "Amazon" then spoke to the doctor. She told him that Minna had been persecuted, but had not, she believed, met with the wound through foul play. She said that she intended to nurse the patient herself, as she felt sorry for her; and ended up by offering him all the money she had if he would only give every attention to the poor unconscious woman before them.

The doctor was touched by the devotion of this fallen women for one of her own sex, and, while he refused her money, saying that Mrs. Leech would have to pay him, he promised to give the case the greatest care and attention. He saw, moreover, that there was some deep mystery about Minna, which Mrs. Leech's explanations to him had not revealed.

The "Amazon," having installed herself as nurse, devoted her time entirely to the sick room; and as she sat and listened to the delirious wanderings of her patient, her great heart filled with pity and the tears stole down her cheeks.

"Oh! George," cried Minna piteously, as she tossed about, "they took me away from you—and we were so happy too—until—until. Oh! yes, bad men made you neglect me just a little—only a little, George—they said you were ill—poor George. I didn't grumble very much, did I, when you neglected me. If I did I'm very sorry. I did not mean to make you unhappy. I thought you were dying and I came to you, and because I couldn't find you—they say you won't take me back—but you will, won't you, George—dear George. Oh! it was that dreadful man; it was horrible, very horrible. I was stolen away, George—but you'll take me back. Poor mother, poor Elsie—no mother, no Elsie. Oh! it is cruel, cruel. I know they are deceiving us, George—your Minna who loves you so—no one left for me now—all gone—all gone—all gone. But you don't think me bad, George. Oh! no! you don't do that—what have I done? Oh! George, my husband, come to me—come and take me away; they are keeping me here. But I know what I'll do—I'll go back. He won't spurn me; he is too noble—too good—too good—too good—dear George."

And so she rambled away, her thoughts at times reverting to the days when she was so happy with her mother and with Elsie. Then she would beseech her husband not to neglect her—not to leave her.

The "Amazon," as she sat and listened, while she endeavored to sooth the delirium, was touched to the heart, and she vowed to horsewhip Holt if ever she met him again. Tender as a child in her feelings towards the poor woman whom she saw suffering before her, she was ready at a moment's notice to do battle against her persecutors, and her mind as she sat there was a strange mixture of tenderness and fierceness.

While Minna lay tossing on her sick bed let us take a look at scenes that were being enacted in another portion of the house. On the ground floor there were a suite of drawing and sitting rooms, and these were brilliantly lighted by numerous chandeliers. The house (one of the finest of the kind in Chicago) was magnificently furnished. Soft carpets, luxurious couches, handsome mirrors, and finely carved furniture, adorned the rooms. No expense evidently had been spared to make the place attractive. It was a palace of sin, a place of gilded wretchedness.

We will now glance at the occupants of these handsomely furnished rooms. There were fair women and handsome men. None appeared sad, although over the hearts of the women there had come a blight, from which they were destined never to recover. They were like moths round a lighted candle, singeing their wings in the flame of dissipation, only to drop suddenly into the flame and be consumed. They were without hope. Their vain regrets were hidden under the mask of assumed gayety or drowned through the influence of the

wine cup. When free from excitement they were dejected and miserable, often mourning over the loss of their home and their separation from lovedones. Their despair goaded them to dissipation, which would soon make sad havoc with their beauty, and then they would sink lower and lower until their ending would be as sad as their lives had been devoid of happiness or joy. It was strange to note the contrast between some of these poor women who dressed handsomely, and in some cases with great taste, as they moved about in Mrs. Leech's brilliantly lighted rooms, a smile upon their lips, while cold despair looked at you through their eyes. Here was a quiet, refined looking woman, dressed in black, and looking very attractive in her mourning. She was the interesting widow. On a lounge reclined a fair young creature, apparently full of fun and frolic. She was only acting her part. At the piano sat a tall, handsome girl, who, while she toyed with the keys, carried on a conversation in a most ladylike manner with a gentleman who was bending over her. On a sofa sat a rather dowdy looking female, good-natured and simple in appearance, but evidently neglected as she sat alone. There was one, however, who appeared to be more animated than any of the others. She danced round the tables, laughing and cracking jokes with every one. At one time she would sing a few lines from some popular song ; at another she would tempt some of the gentlemen present to chase her as she spun round the tables and chairs. She seemed mad with glee. She had taken too much champagne. There were some who were boisterous, others who were quiet in their conduct. In some of the rooms they were playing cards ; in others the frequent pop of the champagne cork proclaimed the dissipation going on. Alto-

gether it was a scene of excitement and revelry which, while it lasted, drowned the misery of these poor women's lives.

There were middle-aged as well as young men to be seen there; all of them well dressed, all of them holding respectable positions in society, all of them helping to complete the utter ruin of the poor women around them.

Towards midnight the revelry became somewhat boisterous, and one of the girls, who had received a fine musical education in her father's house, and who was really a fine musician, sat down at the piano, while one or two gathered round and joined in the chorus of a popular song amidst loud laughter and hilarity.

The sound of the first chorus reached Minna's room, and seemed to increase her delirium. In a moment the "Amazon" had left her charge, and, quickly descending the stairs, she suddenly appeared before the revellers.

"Look here, my fine folks, you just stop that noise; I've got a sick woman up stairs, and you're disturbing her."

They only laughed at her until she strode up to the girl at the piano, and laying her large warm hand on the bare shoulder, said:

"Liz, do you hear me; you are hurting the sick woman up stairs, will you stop, or do you want to have it out with me in the morning?" The girl looked up at the "Amazon," and saw her eyes gleam, and felt her powerful hand contract as it was pressed heavily on her shoulder. She did not like to give way before the others, but she knew that if she dared Nell now, there would be a scene in which she felt the powerful girl beside her would be victorious.

"Yes," she said with bad grace, "I'll stop Nell" (this was the "Amazon's" name when addressed).

"All right," said the "Amazon;" "but don't you make me come down stairs again, or I'll make it hot for some of you."

They only jeered at her, and some were for going on with the fun, but Liz would not play, and finally the hilarity quieted down after the "Amazon" had left the room, and Minna was not disturbed again that night.

If Selby could only have known the deplorable circumstances in which his wife was placed!

The "Amazon" sat all through that night, never closing her eyes, as she watched by the bedside of the delirious woman.

Shortly after midnight she heard some one steal softly up to the door of the room, and give a slight tap. The "Amazon" rose and carefully opened the door, when she saw the girl Liz standing there.

"Nell," she said in a whisper, "I'm very sorry I made so much noise to-night. I've been thinking about it. God help us, poor women, if we have no mercy on each other! I'm awfully sorry, Nell. How is she?—none the worse I hope."

Nell placed her hand gently on the cheeks of the poor girl, who stood before her repentant and with tears in her eyes; and she said in a soft, low voice "Liz, you're a good girl."

"Good girl! Oh, my God!—no, that is past," whispered the other, drawing back. "Good-night, Nell, let me help you to-morrow, if I can—will you, Nell?"

"I'll have nobody but you, Liz," said Nell, as she gently closed the door.

That midnight visit was one ray of sunshine in the life of Liz. She had received one grain of comfort.

CHAPTER XXVI.

For three weeks Minna lay hovering 'twixt life and death, during which time she was tenderly nursed by the "Amazon," assisted by the girl Liz. She had been removed to a remote room in the house by instructions from the doctor, in order that she might be kept perfectly quiet, and free from any noise to disturb her. The "Amazon" had succeeded in keeping down any riotous proceedings in the house, and had even created a feeling of sympathy amongst the girls for her patient; so that they became very subdued in their conduct for the time being. Extra carpeting had been laid in the passage near Minna's room, and all the doors on the same floor were muffled with heavy flannel, so that they produced no jar when being shut. The expense of all this was borne by Mrs. Leech, who was so alarmed lest Minna should die in her house, that she was willing to do anything necessary for her recovery.

In the mean time, Rufus Holt had been in a state of the greatest anxiety ever since the day on which he had treated Minna so brutally, in case Selby should make his appearance and discover his dastardly conduct. He was very anxious to leave Chicago and take up his abode in some place where he would not be likely to meet the man he had so foully wronged, and he had written Mrs. Rolph on the subject. He did not mention to that lady how cruelly he had treated Minna, or

how meanly he had taken advantage of her helplessness; he merely stated that she was in safe-keeping, and that he .was desirous of taking the pleasure trip which had been promised him.

Mrs. Rolph, however, decided to go to Chicago, and see for herself how Holt had carried out her instructions, and, accordingly, she made it convenient to pay him an unexpected visit. He was certainly surprised and not over well pleased when the widow made her appearance one day at the house where he was staying. She knew his address, and had come direct from the railway station to where she could find him most readily, and, therefore, he had been afforded no opportunity to prepare himself for her visit. She inquired immediately about Minna, and asked where he had her concealed, and how he had managed to entrap her so cleverly? Holt was quite unprepared for this prompt questioning, and betrayed his confusion by stammering out some very unsatisfactory answers. He said that Minna was lying ill, but that she was being well attended to, and advised the widow to leave the matter entirely in the hands of the people he had employed to guard her, as there was no danger of Selby ever finding her where she had been placed for safe-keeping. Mrs. Rolph replied that no doubt he had arranged everything satisfactorily; but as he was going away, it would be well to let her know where Minna could be found, as it might be necessary to release her on short notice.

Holt finding himself fairly cornered at last, acknowledged that he had decoyed Minna into a house of questionable character, and gave as his excuse that it was the only place he could find where Minna would be safe from discovery.

Mrs. Rolph, when she heard this, and when she noticed the manner in which Holt endeavored to evade answering her questions, began to suspect something wrong.

She therefore expressed a determination to go and see where Minna was, and requested him to take her there.

Holt hesitated. He had buoyed himself up with the idea, that he would be able to get out of the way ere the widow could ascertain the persecution he had subjected Minna to ; but now it would be discovered, and he was not quite sure how Mrs. Rolph would act under the circumstances. At last he put a bold face on the matter. He knew that the widow was in his power ; he decided to brave her anger, and if she should feel inclined to betray him or even refuse to assist him with more money, he would threaten her—he would oblige her to do as he wished.

He then expressed his willingness to take her to where Minna was confined, and immediately ordered a carriage for that purpose. He suggested, however, the advisability of Mrs. Rolph taking a thick veil to conceal her features on entering the house, as it might be unpleasant if she was observed visiting such a place by any one who might recognize her afterwards. Holt did not care so much about preserving his companion's character as to prevent chances of future detection. He knew that Selby would endeavor to trace his wife's whereabouts, and that it was possible he might visit Chicago for that purpose. If, therefore, he should by any means ascertain that Mrs. Rolph had visited Mrs. Leech's establishment, the incident would be likely to afford a clue to the unravelling of the whole plot. All

Holt cared for now was to get away from Chicago as quickly as possible, and he could only do this through the assistance of the widow. He was therefore desirous of managing matters so as to compel that lady to send him away ; and while consenting to humor her in her desire to visit Minna, he did not intend that his safety should be compromised in so doing.

Mrs. Rolph at once saw the desirability of Holt's suggestion, and so she veiled her face on entering the carriage. As she and Holt drove to Mrs. Leech's door, he expressed his intention of not visiting the house. He had a wholesome dread of again meeting the "Amazon," and, besides, he knew that his appearance with Mrs. Rolph would at once attach suspicion to the object of her visit. He warned the widow not to mention his name, or to profess any knowledge of how Minna came to be brought there. He said that it would answer her purpose better to go to Mrs. Leech's as a friend of Minna, anxious about her safety, and desirous of taking her away if possible.

"You are hiding something from me, Holt," said the widow, "and I think there is some other reason than the one you have given for having taken Mrs. Selby to such a place."

"I was not very sober when it was done," replied Holt, "or else it might have been managed differently."

"Why didn't you say so at once, instead of beating about the bush. You have probably ruined us both."

"I did not expect you would persist in visiting her, and it was my intention to have her removed as soon as it became possible to do so."

"I hope there is nothing worse in this matter than your having committed a mistake while under the in-

fluence of drink," said the widow, looking keenly at her companion.

At this moment Holt said, "We had better not drive up to the door together. I will leave you here. The hackman knows where to drive you;" and as he spoke he hailed the driver, who stopped the carriage, and Holt alighted, saying—"will you return to where I am boarding, or will you go to a hotel?"

"I will return to where you are staying," was the reply. Holt then walked away, while the widow drove on to Mrs. Leech's.

When Mrs. Rolph was admitted to the house she asked to see Mrs. Leech, and on that lady presenting herself she said:

"I believe you have a sick lady staying here. I am a friend of hers, and have come to see about her."

Mrs. Leech trembled when she heard this. She had not enjoyed a moment's peace of mind since the day on which Minna had been brought to her house. Holt had induced her to aid him in his vile plot by the promise of a large reward; but he had carefully kept out of her way ever since, and now she was left to bear the brunt of the whole affair. She fairly quailed with fear before Mrs. Rolph, and could not answer for a moment.

"Do you hear me?" asked the widow, impatiently.

"Yes—yes—" said Mrs. Leech, "there is a sick lady here; but I was misinformed about her by the man who brought her here. If I had known what I do now, it wouldn't have happened."

"What do you know? and what would not have happened? I don't understand you quite," said Mrs. Rolph.

Mrs. Leech looked surprised. "Why I know she is a respectable woman, and if I had known that the man who brought her here was such a mean, cowardly dog, I would not have let him bring her here."

"Well, it has happened, and now we must undo the harm as quickly as possible. Can I see her?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Mrs. Leech, "but she wont know you; she is out of her mind."

"So bad as that?" exclaimed the widow, really quite frightened, but outwardly only appearing as one naturally anxious about a friend.

"She fell and cut her head, and has never moved out of her bed since. She has been very ill."

Mrs. Rolph then asked to see her at once, and Mrs. Leech went to the "Amazon" to tell her that one of Minna's friends had called to see her.

"I'll go and speak to her myself," said the "Amazon." "You needn't come with me, Mrs. Leech."

"You won't get me into trouble, will you, Nell?" asked the latter, anxiously.

"No," was the reply; "but I'll let out pretty well on the chap that brought her here, I can tell you."

When the "Amazon" presented herself before Mrs. Rolph, she said rather abruptly:

"Are you one of the sick woman's folks, and how did you hear that she was here?"

The suddenness of the question rather confused the widow for a moment; but she answered immediately afterwards: "I am a friend of hers; have known her for a number of years, and it was by mere chance I heard she was lying sick here."

"It isn't often we see friends coming here to look after missing girls. You ain't one o' the ordinary."

"I wish to see the sick lady. Can I do so?" asked Mrs. Rolph, a little impatiently.

"I want to speak to you first," said the "Amazon." "You don't know, do you, how she came here, and what happened to her afterwards?"

"No," said the widow; "I would like to know the particulars."

"If you are a friend of hers you ought to know; if you are only a make-believe, it won't do any harm to tell you." The "Amazon" then recounted the whole story, how Holt had been the means of bringing Minna there, and how he had forced himself into her room. She also described the finding of Minna lying on the floor insensible and bleeding.

Mrs. Rolph was horrified. She knew Holt to be bad, but she had no idea he was the brute which the "Amazon" had shown him to be.

When the girl had finished speaking, the widow exclaimed, "This is indeed a dreadful story," and then she added, "Will you bring me to her?"

The "Amazon" at once led the way to Minna's room, and at the door she stopped and impressed upon the widow to be careful not to make the least noise, as it was against the doctor's orders to allow any visitor into the sick chamber.

When Mrs. Rolph entered she could hardly discern anything as the room was darkened; but in a few moments, when her eyes became accustomed to the dim light, she saw extended on the bed the form of Selby's beautiful wife, but so changed in appearance that she hardly recognized her. The great masses of fine brown hair, which Minna had been so proud of, were shorn from her head, and in their place were the bandages

which were used in applying the ice necessary to keep down the fever. The eyes were closed, and the face had a drawn painful look about it, which was very pitiful to behold. Minna was lying perfectly quiet, and seated by her side was the girl Liz, gently working with the bandages and ice. Not a word was spoken by any present, the "Amazon" having warned Mrs. Rolph not to speak while in the room.

Did the sight of the poor hunted, suffering creature who lay before her move one grain of pity within the breast of the cold, cruel woman who stood there? Did she regret that her scheme of revenge had carried so far? Yes, for the moment she felt not only sincere pity, but there immediately followed a feeling of dread when she thought of the consequences to herself should Selby hear how his wife had been treated. She cursed Holt from the bottom of her heart; she determined never to have anything more to do with him, only to send him away where Selby would not be likely to meet him. If she could have undone at that moment all her scheme of revenge, she would gladly have done so; but, as that could not be accomplished, she realized how necessary it was now to secure her own safety, by guarding against detection.

Touching the arm of the "Amazon," she motioned towards the door, and together they softly left the sick chamber and descended the stairs.

"The man who has done this is a dreadful scoundrel," said the widow, when she and the "Amazon" reached the drawing-room. "He has blasted the reputation of an innocent woman, and he has ruined her in the opinion of her husband."

"It won't be well if I ever lay my hands on him," interrupted the "Amazon."

"Your patient will not be strong enough for removal from this house for some time," continued Mrs. Rolph, "and I do not wish her husband to know that she has been an inmate here. I would like her to be taken somewhere else before he knows where to find her."

"I don't see that it makes much difference where he finds her," said the "Amazon," "so long as she has done nothing wrong."

"He is a very suspicious man, and his mind has been poisoned against his wife. I know what is for the best in this case. I intend to do what I can to bring about a reconciliation, but I must do it my own way."

"Well, what do you want done?"

"As soon as she is able to be removed we will have her taken to some comfortable house," said the widow, "and there I will bring her husband to see her; but if she should wish to send him any message before then, or if she should ask anybody to write for her, tell her to wait until she sees me. Here is my address" (handing her card). "I will take any message she has to send. I will see it delivered in person to her husband, and I will bring him to her; but not here. Tell her to wait until she is able to leave this house. If I should have to leave Chicago for a few days, take care of her until my return. I will send you money to-day, to procure every comfort for her."

"What you say may be all right enough," answered the "Amazon," "but I'll do just what the poor thing herself may wish to be done. God knows, if she ever will get well. But I tell you what I'll do, though, if you let me know where to find you. I'll send you word when she is able to understand what people say to her, and you can come and talk to her yourself."

"If you promise to do that, it will answer the purpose. I will come at once when you send for me; and if I leave Chicago I will send you word where I go to. I will not delay a moment in coming."

Mrs. Rolph then bade adieu to the "Amazon," and once more lowering her veil she entered the carriage, and drove away to see Holt.

She found that worthy waiting for her at his boarding-house, and when they were alone she said:

"I always knew you to be mean and contemptible, but I did not imagine that you were the low, cowardly villain you have proved to be in your conduct towards Mrs. Selby."

"You are using pretty hard language," replied Holt defiantly; "I would like to know who was the prime mover in this business."

"It is true I placed a woman in your power; but did I ever tell you to use her as you have done? Did I not rather impress upon you not to use any cruelty? Have you carried out my wishes, or have you sought to gratify your own vile desires? You are a perfect brute!"

"Have a care, Mrs. Rolph," said Holt angrily; "I told you I was under the influence of liquor when I took Mrs. Selby to that house; if I hadn't been, it would not have happened; but no harm's been done."

"No harm been done?" cried the widow. "If you had seen her as I saw her lying in that dreadful place, so helpless, so utterly changed, you would think some harm has been done. It is doubtful whether she will recover, and, in any case, I would not like to be in your place if Selby hears of it."

"I think there are two of us who will row in the

same boat in that case," answered Holt; "for I have your letters, Mrs. Rolph, and I think they show you are not altogether free from blame."

Mrs. Rolph took no notice of the implied threat, but she said: "It will be necessary for you to leave Chicago at once, and I would advise you to keep out of Selby's way."

"I have no objection to leave at once; but it costs money, and money I have not."

"I will give you what I promised; but I may as well tell you plainly that you need not apply to me for more, because you will not get it. After what has happened, you and I must part forever. We never can be friends again. You needn't try to black-mail me either, for sooner than be troubled by you, I will let Selby know the whole truth. I am only a woman, and can brave his anger; but you are a man, and he will not let you escape very easily. Now you understand me—so no more threats; they are useless."

Holt looked at Mrs. Rolph. He saw that she was in earnest, and so he thought he would propitiate her. She was too valuable a friend to lose.

"I am very sorry, Amelia, for what has taken place. I did not mean to threaten you; won't you forgive a fellow? if I could mend matters I would gladly do so. I wish it hadn't happened."

"It will depend on yourself whether we will renew our friendship; at present I think it better for us to part. The remembrance of what you have done here will not be pleasant to either of us."

Holt made no reply, but he resolved that the widow should not give him up.

Mrs. Rolph then handed Holt a check on her

banker in Chicago, with which he seemed perfectly well satisfied; after which he told her where he intended to go on leaving the city, and then they separated, never to meet again on earth.

The widow now decided to remain in Chicago until such time as Minna should become sufficiently strong to be removed from Mrs. Leech's. She was very anxious about the recovery of Minna, as her death might lead to some very awkward developments, which, if ascertained, would certainly result in Holt being sent for, and probably put under arrest.

Her first step was to arrange a place of meeting with the "Amazon," where she could learn tidings of Minna's condition from time to time, without having to go to Mrs. Leech's house. Her great fear was lest Selby should arrive in Chicago, and every day she made it a point to examine the newspapers minutely to see whether his name appeared on any of the hotel registers. She had taken rooms in a comfortable boarding-house, where she could be free from observation, if Selby did arrive; and a few days after Holt's departure she was sitting scanning the newspapers as usual, when her eyes chanced to light on the description of a frightful railway accident near a small town on the C. & W. R. R. As she read on she was horrified to observe the name of Rufus Holt amongst the killed. His identity had been discovered through some letters found upon his person.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "his punishment has followed close upon his sin." Then the thought of the letters she had written to him flashed across her mind, and the probability of their being found amongst his luggage sent a thrill of alarm through her.

In a moment she decided to leave by the first train to visit the scene of the accident. She might be in time; the disaster had happened only the day previous, the news having come by telegraph. Acting on this resolve she at once went and notified the "Amazon" that she would be absent for a day or two; but she did not mention her errand, or that Holt had been killed.

Mrs. Rolph accordingly left that day for the scene of the accident, and with her she brought certain letters which Holt had written to her, in order to prove that she was a friend of his, and that she was entitled as such to take charge of his luggage.

She was going to face an ordeal which she did not anticipate.

CHAPTER XXVII.

When Selby decided to go in search of Mrs. Rolph, he visited a business firm with whom the widow had numerous monetary transactions; but they could not give him any definite information as to where she had gone. They had received a telegram from her a few days previous, dated at Montreal, but they could not say whether she was still there. To Montreal, therefore, Selby concluded to go, hoping if she had left that city to obtain at least some trace of her. Tim accompanied his master, and did all in his power to cheer him up. The faithful servant was firm in his conviction that his mistress had been either spirited away in some unaccountable manner, or had been induced to leave home by some designing person for an evil purpose. He would not believe, however, that any harm would come to her; he used to say that she was too good for any one to injure her. Selby, however, took a more desponding view of the matter. He felt now how much he had neglected his wife, and feared est despair might have driven her away from him. His chief dread, however, was of finding out that she had left with Rufus Holt, in which case he felt he could never become reconciled to her or consent to take her back.

When he and Tim reached Montreal they found the

widow's name registered at the St. Lawrence Hall ; but she had left there some days before their arrival. They made every possible inquiry about her, but could not discover where she had gone, as she had left no word behind her.

Tim then suggested St. Louis as a likely place to find her, as she had numerous friends there, some of whom might at least know something about her movements. Selby at first expressed unwillingness to go there, as he knew it would be the means of raking up old recollections, not very pleasant to think about now. But the remembrance that Holt had gone there when he left New York decided him to act on Tim's suggestion. He would at least find out some clue to the movements of the man whom he suspected of having robbed him of his wife. He therefore decided to go to St. Louis, and lost no time in doing so.

Immediately after his arrival there, as he was sitting in the reading-room of the hotel looking over the newspapers while waiting for Tim to announce that everything was ready for him to change his clothes after travelling, his eye chanced to fall on a description of the same railway accident which had arrested Mrs. Rolph's attention. He, too, read over the list of killed and wounded, and he, too, was startled to find the name of Rufus Holt among the former. Suddenly the thought presented itself. Was Minna with Holt at the time? Then he once more read over the names of those who had suffered by the accident, but he could not see his wife's name. There were, however, several unknown persons amongst the killed, two of whom were ladies. Could Minna be one of these? It was a terrible thought, and Selby sank back in his chair, overcome by the

horrible idea which he could not banish from his mind.

When Tim appeared his master showed him the newspaper, and pointed out Holt's name. "We must go there, Tim," he said; "she might have been on the train, who knows?"

Tim looked at his master in surprise. "You can't find out anything from Mr. Holt, sir, he's dead, and what could make you think she was on the train? You surely, sir, don't suppose my mistress would travel in company with that chap. Oh! no, sir, you don't do that, I am sure."

Selby had not revealed to Tim his suspicions in regard to Holt. He had never mentioned the anonymous letter he had received on the subject, and therefore the servant could not understand the impulse which caused his master to express himself as he had done.

But Selby overruled all Tim's objections, and insisted upon starting by the first train for the scene of the accident. Mrs. Rolph was entirely forgotten in the excitement of the moment.

It had been a frightful accident, and a great many had been killed, while a large number were seriously wounded. The latter had been conveyed away, some to the hospital, others to houses of citizens who were willing to receive them; but the former had been collected together and laid out in a long shed belonging to the railway company, where friends and relatives could go and identify them.

Mrs. Rolph, immediately on her arrival, had gone to the proper officials, and, presenting her letters, said that she had come as an old friend of Rufus Holt, to take

charge of his effects and see to his proper burial. She produced, in support of her statement, several letters written by the deceased, and also furnished the names of parties in St. Louis and New York who could vouch for her reliability. Holt's checks were then procured, and Mrs. Rolph was allowed permission to have the trunks opened and examined. This is all she really wanted, and, before even going to see Holt, she by the assistance of a locksmith succeeded in ransacking his luggage and secured all the letters she could find. She then stated to the officials that she would leave the luggage with them until she had attended to the burial of the unfortunate man. It was not quite in order for the officials to allow what they had done in Mrs. Rolph's case; but she was so collected, so matter-of-fact in her manner, and they were in such a state of confusion from the excitement of the accident, that she managed to accomplish her purpose without any difficulty or objection being raised to prevent her.

Mrs. Rolph had never thought how completely she was placing herself in Holt's power when she was penning her letters of instruction to him in regard to Minna. She may have calculated on regaining possession of them from him; but, if she had done so, it certainly escaped her memory when she parted from him in Chicago. Now, however, she realized how dangerous it would be for her if the letters were discovered, and she therefore was so anxious to examine the packet she had taken from the dead man's trunk, that she returned to her hotel without even going to see the mutilated form of her old friend.

The widow sat for hours in her room pouring over Holt's letters, and in the course of her inspection she

found all the documents she was in search of except one. The missing letter was a very important one, and the widow sat in the twilight thinking what was best to be done. She wondered if Holt could have had the letter in his pocket when he was killed, and if so whether it was still to be found on the body, or had it been taken away with other papers by the officials when making a search to identify the victims of the accident. She had never thought of asking to examine the papers found on Holt's person; but she could still do so. It was important, therefore, that there should be no delay; and accordingly she decided to return at once to the railway station. It being now quite dark, she procured the assistance of the landlord of the hotel where she was staying, who, taking with him a lantern, accompanied her to the temporary morgue. As she desired to ascertain whether all the papers and valuables had really been removed from the bodies, she went first to the shed where they lay, in order to make some inquiries before again visiting the railway officials.

A train had just arrived, bringing a number of the friends and relatives of the victims; and when Mrs. Rolph arrived at the shed there were several persons entering it to look at the bodies. It was a terrible sight, the row of motionless figures lying on the floor, covered over to conceal the horrible mutilation some of them had suffered. Overhead the dim light of lanterns hung from the ceiling gave a ghastly appearance to the scene. Here and there were relatives looking with blanched faces for the forms of loved ones whom they hoped not to find in that place of death. As face after face was uncovered, in the dreadful search going on, there would at times be heard a smothered cry or piercing shriek,

as the well-known features of some lost one were recognized. The dim light, the flickering of the lanterns, the softened tones of the speakers, and the sobs of the distressed ones who mourned over friends and relatives, all combined, made it a scene not soon to be forgotten. Mrs. Rolph passed quietly from one corpse to the other, attended by the landlord, who, as the face of each victim was gently uncovered, would lower his lantern to allow his companion to see the features of the dead more plainly. At last they came to one form, and, as they stood over it, a gentleman accompanied by his servant came up and took a position opposite, and when the features of Rufus Holt were uncovered Mrs. Rolph involuntarily raised her eyes to look at the stranger, when, to her horror, she recognized George Selby, the man above all others whom she least expected to meet, the one whom she would have given worlds to be able to avoid at that moment.

"George Selby!"

"Mrs. Rolph!"

The two exclamations were uttered simultaneously.

"This is a strange meeting," said Selby.

"A dreadful one," returned the widow.

"Were you with him when the accident happened?" asked Selby.

"No." replied Mrs. Rolph, "I saw it in the papers and came here at once."

"Have you recognized any one else, Mrs. Rolph, amongst the killed whom we know?" said Selby in a tremulous tone.

"There is no one else whom we know," replied the widow. "This is the only one," pointing to the body of Holt. "I have looked at all the others."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Selby, who had just come in when he met Mrs. Rolph.

He then moved quietly round to the side of the widow, and said in a low tone:

"I am looking for my wife, Mrs. Rolph, do you know anything of her?" And pointing to the lifeless body of Holt he added, "Did he know?"

"I do know something about her," answered the widow. "I think he knew a great deal more."

Selby trembled at the words of the woman beside him. They implied that his worst fears were about to be realized. He said, "I must speak to you, Mrs. Rolph, but not here; will you come with me? Where are you staying? I will accompany you."

Mrs. Rolph at once consented to return to her hotel. It would not do to prosecute her search while Selby was present. They left the shed, therefore, together, while Tim strode on before them by the side of the landlord, who held the lantern to guide their footsteps. Hardly a word was spoken between Selby and his companion during the walk from the railway station to the hotel; but on reaching the latter, and being shown into a private sitting room, George Selby turned to Mrs. Rolph, and said:

"Now, madam, I would like to hear what you know about Mrs. Selby. How did you happen to be aware of her disappearance?"

"I never said that I knew she had disappeared. I merely said that I could give you some information about her when you informed me that you were looking for her."

"She went away," said Selby. "She has not yet returned to my knowledge. She drove away in your

carriage, Mrs. Rolph. What have you to say about it?"

"I have very little to say, Selby; I am afraid you expect to hear more from me than I am able to tell. I paid a visit to Mrs. Selby on the day she left home. She was in the midst of packing when I called, and she appeared to be very excited. I asked her where she was going. She said that she was going to see you; that you were sick somewhere, I forget the place she mentioned, and added that Holt was to meet her and take her to you. I told her not to place too much confidence in Holt. She seemed put out when I made the remark, but she did not reply. She said she was very lonely; that you neglected her, and that she was glad of the opportunity to have a change. As my carriage was at the door she proposed that I should drive her to the railway station, which I did. I know nothing more about your wife. I suspect, however, that if Holt were alive he could tell more about her than I can. I heard nothing more about Mrs. Selby until you told me you were looking for her. I then suspected something wrong. I left New York the day following her departure, and have been travelling ever since."

It was a well concocted story. Only one part of it struck Selby as strange.

"Why did you warn Mrs. Selby against Holt?" he asked. "I thought he was a great friend of yours."

"Because," said the widow, "I knew him to be unprincipled, and I was aware that he had been on very intimate terms at your house. You left your wife too much alone, George Selby, that is why I warned her."

"Are you telling me the truth, Mrs. Rolph?"

"Selby!" she exclaimed, "what do you mean?"

"I cannot forget," replied Selby gloomily, "that you once said it would be better for us to be friends than enemies. I am not quite sure whether we have been on very good terms ever since. It would be cruel to deceive me. I have suffered enough already, God knows."

"I was very intimate with your wife, Selby. If I had been your enemy I could have shown it long ago. She will tell you I always had a good word for you."

"Well! well!" said Selby, "I may have maligned you. I am dreadfully cut up. I don't expect I ever will see my wife again. She knew I would not be absent over a couple of weeks, and if she has not returned there is something wrong. God help that unfortunate fellow lying yonder, if he has betrayed the confidence of a confiding woman."

When Selby separated from Mrs. Rolph he had little hope of being able to trace the whereabouts of his wife, and in speaking afterwards to Tim he said:

"There is no use, Tim, running about the country any longer. Mrs. Rolph cannot give me any information to guide us. If Mrs. Selby has not returned to the "Oaks" by this time she will never return. I am going back to New York to-morrow."

"Well, sir, I watched Mrs. Rolph when you were speaking to her at the railway shed. The light from one of the lanterns shone on her face, so that I could see it well, and if she wasn't in fear, and she doesn't know more than she wants to let on, then I ain't no judge of human nature."

"I don't agree with you, Tim; you are prejudiced against her. She told a very straightforward story. If Holt was alive I think he could give us some news. I see no hope, my lad—I wish to God I could."

Tim, however, did not give up hope. He resolved to return to New York with his master; but if he did not find his mistress at the "Oaks" on his arrival there, he was going to start out to find her, if it took him his whole lifetime to do so. He loved Selby, but he loved his mistress better. He would never desert her.

Selby accordingly departed the next day for New York, utterly dejected, utterly heart-broken, a sad and disappointed man. Tim felt for his master, and was quite concerned about him. He looked so careworn, so changed from his former self.

Mrs. Rolph succeeded in securing all the effects belonging to Holt, and when she had attended to his burial, she returned once more to Chicago, feeling that she still had the game in her own hands, and congratulating herself upon having so easily got rid of Selby.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHEN Mrs. Rolph returned to Chicago the "Amazon" informed her that Minna was out of danger, although still too weak to be removed from Mrs. Leech's. She had been asking piteously for her husband, but had been quieted by the promise of a visit from Mrs. Rolph. The "Amazon" was therefore very glad to see the widow back again, and urged her to lose no time in coming to see the sick woman.

Mrs. Rolph at once decided upon a course of action. She would have Minna removed to comfortable and repectable quarters as soon as possible. She would volunteer to carry a message from her to Selby, and she would then visit New York; but instead of trying to unite the husband and wife, she would endeavor to induce the former to travel abroad, in order that the latter might suppose that she was indeed a deserted wife. She hoped that a year's separation would result in a final severing of the bonds between the two. She, however, miscalculated the strength and endurance of a true woman's love, and only gauged Minna's character by her own. She had been once disappointed in her love, and it had turned her into a cold-hearted, wicked woman; but love such as Minna bore for her husband could never be quenched, it would always live within her to protect her, it would always keep her pure no matter how

sorely she might be tried. But it is generally thus; we are all too apt to judge others by our own standard. And here is where Mrs. Rolph made the great mistake in regard to Minna.

When Mrs. Rolph paid her second visit to Mrs. Leech's she found Minna dreadfully altered. Her thin, pale face looking so sad, so utterly wretched and helpless, and her great eyes looking up so beseechingly, as if imploring to be taken away, that had the widow not feared to face the just anger of Selby, she would have abandoned her schemes, and come to the assistance of the poor suffering woman who was so completely at her mercy. But Mrs. Rolph had not the courage to forego her plans, she had gone too far to draw back at this stage; and so, like the serpent of old, she spoke with an oily tongue to the woman whose happiness she intended to ruin forever.

"I am so sorry to see you in this sad state, my dear," she said. "It was so fortunate I happened to find out where you were; and now we will soon have you all right again." And she gently pressed the emaciated hand of the sick woman.

"I want so much to see George," replied Minna, hardly above a whisper. "Why does he not come to me?"

"He does not know you are here, my dear. You have been cruelly treated; but don't worry, you will soon see Mr. Selby."

"When?" asked Minna.

"As soon as you can be taken from this house. You must get strong soon, and then we will remove you where your husband can come to see you. He would be shocked to find you here."

"Why?" said Minna, "I didn't come here of my own will; I have nothing to be ashamed of."

"My dear Mrs. Selby, will you trust me? Will you be a brave little woman? Try and be patient for a few days longer; I know it is for the best. I will remain in Chicago until you are well enough to be taken from here. Then I will go for Mr. Selby—I will take any message for you. I will bring him to you. It is only for a few days. Won't you trust me?"

"If you think it is for the best, I will; but it is so hard; it seems so long since I saw George, poor fellow. Somebody told me he thinks I ran away from him. Oh! it was cruel, cruel."

The "Amazon" now stepped softly to the bedside, and gently soothed Minna. She saw that the exertion of talking had been too much for her, and so she insisted quietly on Mrs. Rolph going away.

In a few days Minna was able to be removed. The hope of seeing her husband seemed to give her strength, when she was comfortably settled in the small cottage in the outskirts of the city which had been procured for her by Mrs. Rolph. As soon as these arrangements were completed the widow left for New York, ostensibly to bring Selby back with her.

The "Amazon" and the girl, Liz, both accompanied Minna from Mrs. Leech's, as she still required careful nursing; and Mrs. Rolph had left sufficient money for all the expenses. Minna had pleaded to be taken to New York, but the doctor had pronounced against such a step until she grew stronger.

One day the "Amazon" and Liz were sitting together talking, while their patient was sleeping quietly in the adjoining room.

"Liz," said the "Amazon," "it was all right when we were at Mrs. Leech's, because no decent woman would go there to nurse the poor creature; but now I'm thinking it ain't fair to her for us to stop here; she can get some one better than us to stay with her."

"I've been thinking the same thing, Nell," replied Liz; "they'll be saying she's as bad as we are to keep us around her."

"Yes," said the "Amazon" bitterly, "people can forgive robbery, and even murder, but there's never a good word for the like of us."

"I remember once reading in the Good Book how Christ forgave a woman who was just as bad as us, Nell. There's maybe a chance for us."

"God Almighty may pardon us, but I don't think any of the folks on earth will; that's my experience so far."

"It's pretty much so," answered Liz; "we're like the lepers of old,—people keep at a distance from us for fear we'd taint them if we touch them. I've seen ladies sweep their dresses away when I passed, as if there was contagion about me."

"Yes," said Nell, "and maybe if all was known some o' them were no better than you. Now, there's that innocent thing in the next room, she ain't one of that sort. There's heaps o' good women in this world who pity us, but they don't help us. We're the only ones in this world there's no help for."

"It's awful, ain't it, Nell? There's no use on trying to be good; no one'll trust us, and that's what sends us girls to the devil so quick."

At that moment they heard a stir in the next room, and when they went in they found Minna awake and looking much refreshed by her sleep.

The two girls then went to work to make the room tidy and comfortable, while Minna watched their movements, her eyes following them wistfully, as if longing to be able to join them.

Then the "Amazon" sat down near the foot of the bed, while Liz made preparations to bathe Minna's face and hands, so as to make her feel fresh. It was a strange sight to see these poor girls so tenderly nursing one whom they almost expected would shun and despise them when she learned their true character. They knew very well that Minna in her innocence did not realize how fallen they were. It is true she had formed the idea that Mrs. Leech's house was not a fit place to be in; but her two nurses, she had only seen them full of love and tenderness towards herself, she had received nothing but kindness from them, she had experienced nothing but goodness at their hands, how could she understand that they were depraved women? how could she know that they were loose and dissipated in their morals at other times, when to her they had always seemed so true and good?

They had learned to love the poor suffering woman they had so patiently nursed; it was like a glimpse at a better life while they had been by her bedside. Her very purity and innocence had been pleasant for them to come in contact with; and now they were about to sacrifice their temporary happiness, of their own free will, in order to save another woman's good name. They were about to go out voluntarily into a life of darkness once more, lest by staying they might dim the sunshine of a pure woman's life by the contamination of their presence. Ah! there was something noble in the conduct of those poor, ill-used, persecuted women.

Persecuted! The story of their lives, which they were about to tell, will show whether or not they suffered persecution.

It was the "Amazon" who spoke first.

"Liz and I," she said, "have been thinking that it is time for us to leave you now. There's plenty of better nurses than us to be had,—and we oughtn't to stay here."

"Oh! Nell," replied Minna (she had learned the girl's name), "you have grown tired of me;" and the tears filled Minna's eyes as she added, "I suppose it is selfish of me to wish to keep you longer; but I will miss you so much. I know it must have been far from pleasant for you."

"It has been the happiest time we have had for many a day," interrupted the "Amazon"—"hasn't it, Liz?"

"Oh! yes," said Liz, "the very happiest."

"Oh! don't go, then; just stay a little longer—until —until my husband comes," said Minna earnestly.

"It's not that Liz and I want to leave you," said Nell, "but it isn't right for us to stay. We ain't good enough to be here."

"Good enough!" said Minna, "what do you mean? Why, you are two of the very best creatures in the world."

The "Amazon" and Liz looked at each other, and a pained expression passed over their features.

"You don't know us," said the former—"we can't be much worse than we are, but it's right to let you know, for I ain't going to leave you without telling you. If you want us to stay after I've told you the truth—well, we'll see."

Liz dropped her head until her face was hid as she

rested it on the side of Minna's bed, while the "Amazon" told the story of their disgrace.

"I suppose you know Mrs. Leech's house was not a fit place for you, ma'am. Well, Liz and I were living there—it wasn't for no good we did that. We ain't the sort that's thought to be proper companions for an honest woman like yourself. You wouldn't like to be seen speaking to us on the street. Why should we stay here to bring disgrace upon your name? Do you understand me now? Perhaps you never thought of it; but we ain't so bad as to wish to hurt you."

Minna placed one of her thin hands on the head of the girl beside her, and gently stroked her hair; the other she held out to the "Amazon."—"Nell," she said, "all I know—all I wish to know is, that you and Liz have given me my life. You have been more than sisters to me. I care not what the world may say; it will not be my wish that we separate. Oh! Nell, do you and Liz think me so ungrateful?"

The "Amazon" could hardly speak. The tears welled into her eyes. "May God bless you for these words," she said; "they are the only kind ones we've had for a long, long time."

The girl Liz did not utter a word, but she sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Come! come!" said Minna, "you must cheer up, Liz, or it will be my turn to nurse you and Nell; and she smiled sweetly on the "Amazon" who sat looking wonderingly at her as the tears coursed down her cheeks.

It was so unexpected, this loyalty of Minna to them. They had never looked for such a reward. It was above gold—it was more precious in their eyes than if she had heaped all the riches of the earth upon their

heads. They had expected to be despised. What gall and bitterness it is to a woman to be spurned!—but, instead, they had received kind, loving words.

For some moments neither of the girls spoke. Then the "Amazon" said—"It's real downright kindhearted of you to say what you've done to us; but I do still kind o' think we ought to go. We wouldn't think of it if you weren't getting better, and if you could get no one to nurse you. What do you say, Liz?"

"I'd like to stay, Nell," said the girl eagerly, "if—if by doing so we won't injure her."

"And you will stay," said Minna. "Now, Nell, not another word on the subject."

And so it was settled that the two girls should remain with Minna.

A few days afterwards, as the "Amazon" was sitting alone with Minna, the latter said:

"Nell, will you tell me something of your life, and how it is poor girls are made to suffer, as I know you and Liz have done? I often think of it now. Tell me about it. You need not hesitate with me. I am your friend, and it is not from mere curiosity I ask. I sympathize with you, Nell."

"I know you do, ma'am; but it ain't a pleasant story to tell. It's not that I mind speaking to you; but I think it would be better for you not to hear it."

"It is my wish, Nell; the day may come when I can be a friend to some of the poor girls. I want to learn something of their sad lives; so tell me all about it, Nell."

"Their lives are sad, very sad, to be sure, although they look merry enough sometimes. I've seen them so down-hearted that one would think they never could smile again, and in a short time after they would be

laughing and joking as if they had never known any trouble. It's when they're alone with their own thoughts; it's when they have no companions to be merry with, and when they are free from the excitement of liquor, that the girls feel bad. That's the time they think of the happy homes they have left and the friends and dear ones they are separated from forever. It's to drown their sorrow that they drink so much wine. It is to banish the thoughts of the past that they are so mad sometimes in their frolic, so reckless and careless altogether."

"Poor creatures!" said Minna, feelingly, and forgetting for the moment that the girl before her was only describing a part of her own life.

"You may say so; we have all sorts amongst us girls. We have some who were well brought up, others who had bad parents, some who were betrayed, and others who brought their disgrace on themselves through their foolishness (I am one o' that sort). We have a few that are bad from nature, who never were good, and who prefer a life of shame to any other, for the excitement it brings with it. There's no hope at all for the last lot, although there's very little hope for any of us."

"Don't say that, Nell!" interrupted Minna, "don't say that."

"It is the truth. What hope can there be for us? Let one of us try to do better, would any one employ us —would any one take us into their homes? If we did get work, wouldn't somebody step up and tell what we had been, and then wouldn't we be jeered at and kicked out, I'd like to know? If we did try to live a decent life wouldn't we be insulted? We are the only people in this civilized world who are not protected. We are treated

as criminals; we are hunted by the police; and when we try to be good, who is there to take our part? No one. When a girl goes to the bad she soon learns that there's no hope for her; it's despair that makes her go from bad to worse, and it ends up by her defying the world. She gets reckless, and almost takes a pride in behaving as bad as she can. She learns to swear, and drink, and carry on like mad."

"Oh! Nell," said Minna, quite shocked, "surely not so bad as that."

"You told me to tell you all about it. I am only telling you half," said the "Amazon" almost roughly, carried away by her feelings. "You don't know how bad a woman can be when she gets going down hill."

"Surely all are not so bad as you have described."

"Some are quieter than others. There's Liz, for instance, she was well brought up; she can play the piano, and sing; and do most anything ladies can do. She's one of the quiet sort, although I've seen her carry on sometimes pretty bad. We have girls that are clever, others ignorant and stupid; some are simple and others cunning; and it often happens that the loveliest and cleverest girls—those that are courted and flattered by the men at parties and balls—are the ones who, in an evil moment, fall victims to scoundrels who claim to be gentlemen. There's lots of these amongst us girls. I was a farmer's daughter, and took to going to dances too much. I used to stay out late at the neighbors' houses, and go home with young fellows when I ought to be in bed, under my father's roof. The end was I ran away with a young man who left me without marrying me. I wouldn't go home then. I went into service; but it wasn't long till I got going out again to dances, staying out late at night. I

lost one place after another, until I gave up service altogether and went right off to the bad. When you hear the story of one of us girls you hear the story of hundreds of others. There are just these things that ruin girls and women, so far as I've heard it from their own lips. They're either betrayed by false lovers—and a girl ought to know who she's keeping company with—or they're so fond of dress and finery that they'll do most anything for it; or they're too fond of gadding about with fellows; or they're bad by nature. I've known wives to be driven to the bad by the neglect or cruelty of their husbands. I've known others who were persuaded in an evil moment by scoundrels to leave their homes, only to find themselves adrift afterwards. There's any number of factory girls and shop girls driven to the bad by the over-work and bad pay they get. When they see us girls, dressed up in silks and living so easy like, they are tempted, and when once they get that length it don't take long for them to join us. I have known misery and want send women to the bad. I know one woman who gave herself up to a life of shame to save her children from starvation; 'twould have been better if she had let them die. People don't think of the trials women have to go through; but once they go wrong they never can turn back, ninety-nine cases out of a hundred."

"Oh! Nell, this is dreadful what you have told me. Are there none who interest themselves on behalf of the poor girls?"

"There are some," said the "Amazon," "but they don't go the right way about it; they make the thing too public. They have what they call "Homes," but what girl likes to go where every one knows what she's been, and

looks at her with a sort of scornful pity? I'd sooner remain a bad woman than stand that. It's the scorn of the world that prevents many of us girls from becoming good. We all know that there's a mark set on us, like there was on Cain once, and go where we will somebody will point us out. What's the use of being good when nobody will trust us?"

"Oh! yes, they would," interrupted Minna.

"But they won't," replied the "Amazon." "There is no charity in this world for fallen women. They have lots of preachers and ministers, but do they ever visit us?—not very often. Why, they would be afraid of having their characters besmirched if they did such a thing. The gospel, as it is preached to-day, is for everybody but us. Why, if we went into the house of God, who would sit in the same pew with us, I'd like to know? Oh! no, ma'am, we understand that we're outcasts; there's no help for us—no hope this side of the grave."

"Nell! Nell!" exclaimed Minna, "there is hope for every one."

"For all but us," replied the "Amazon." "There are two things against us: first, the reckless despair that comes over a woman when she falls, and, secondly, the dread folks have of doing anything for her, or being seen helping her. The men can't do it for fear of hurting their own characters, and the women are the most pitiless of all to their own fallen sisters. But there's no use talking any more about it, I'm tiring you;" and the "Amazon" rose from her seat, and went into the next room to see if Liz was awake.

The girl Liz had changed greatly from the night when she crept repentant to the door of Minna's room in Mrs. Leech's. She had become very quiet, almost

sad in her manner; her face was getting pinched and worn-looking, and the "Amazon" grew concerned about her. The fact is, regret and remorse were slowly eating her life away, ever since she had been in the quiet of the sick-room. She dreaded going back to her old life; she began to weary of living at all. She was not a strong girl, and her unhappy thoughts, preying on her mind, caused her to droop and fade. The "Amazon" would try and cheer her up, and in her own protecting sort of way she would tell her that, instead of going back to Mrs. Leech's, they would brave the world together. They would live a good life; and, in the battle against the jeers and insults of the world, she, the great strong girl, would be like a big sister to her weaker companion.

Thus matters stood, as Minna and her two strange companions lived on quietly and undisturbed in their cottage; she gaining strength every day, while they became more and more attached to her.

Every day she looked forward eagerly for news from Mrs. Rolph, until at last her anxiety began to have a bad effect on her convalescence. It required all the reasoning powers of the "Amazon" to calm Minna, who now felt strong enough to leave Chicago. She had just decided to start for New York, when the mail brought her the expected letter.

When the "Amazon" handed it to her, she took it with trembling hands—she could hardly open it. As she read the contents, her eyes became riveted on the paper before her; she never spoke, but she had such a stony set look about her face that her two companions became frightened.

"What is it?" asked the "Amazon"—"what is the matter?"

"He has gone away," said Minna slowly, "and I have not seen him. Read it," and she held the letter out—she shed not a tear, but in a moment she appeared to have changed, her face told plainly the deep anguish she was suffering. As Liz took the letter up to read it Minna sank back on her pillow, her white face looking like death, her eyes having that fixed look in them that told of inward suffering, too great almost to bear. Liz read the letter aloud. It was as follows:

"MY DEAR MRS. SELBY:

"On my arrival here I was taken suddenly ill—so ill that I was unable to see your husband. The doctors would not even let me write. I sent for him the moment they would let me, but he was not in New York. He had gone to Europe to travel. No one knows when he will return. He told a friend of mine he never would come back. I would have written him, but no one can tell me his address. I am going to make inquiries. You had better remain in Chicago, as the "Oaks" is closed and the servants have all gone away. You may depend upon me as your friend. I will come to see you in a few days, and we will talk over the matter. I will tell you more then. Cheer up, Mrs. Selby, it will all come right, but I think it was very cruel of Selby to leave you in this way.

"Your Affectionate friend.

"AMELIA ROLPH."

"A fine how-do-you-do!" exclaimed the "Amazon." "That ain't an honest letter. Too sick, indeed, was she? That's how fine folks do their errands, is it? The Lord protect me from such like. Couldn't she have sent a message saying you were here?"

"I am going at once to New York, Nell. I will go

to-morrow," said Minna, quietly; "I will send word to my husband myself. I never ought to have trusted to another; but I was so weak."

"You are too weak now," said the "Amazon." "I don't like to say, don't go; but I hate to see you going as you are."

"Will you and Liz come with me, Nell?"

"Worse and worse," exclaimed the "Amazon." "It was bad enough for us to stay here with you; but for the like of us to be seen travelling with you, it wouldn't do, ma'am. Liz and me have made up our minds to try a new life; we ain't going back to our old ways. It's a hard struggle before us. We know what we've got to face; but I'm strong, and can fight for both, can't I, Liz?" and the great girl bared her strong arms as if it was muscular force she was expected to show; but she had a strong will, this "Amazon," as strong as the strength in her body.

"Nell, I want you and Liz to come with me," said Minna; "I am not strong, and I don't know what is before me. It looks all very dark just now, but I know when I explain all to my husband he will believe me. He thinks me bad now—he has been cruelly deceived, as I was; but when he hears my story he will take me to his arms. He is good and noble at heart—he will be your friend for my sake, Nell."

They then talked over the matter in all its bearings, and at last it was decided that they would go to New York together. They fortunately had sufficient money; and so, leaving the key of the cottage with a neighbor, and telling her that one of them would return soon to look after the furniture, they took their departure the next day.

CHAPTER XXIX.

When Mrs. Rolph saw George Selby, soon after her arrival in New York, she found him so altered in appearance that she hardly recognized him. He had grown very thin and careworn, and in his manner very quiet and sad. It seemed as if his great trouble was wearing him away, and the widow, when she looked at him, felt that she was indeed revenged ; she experienced no pity, but she had a feeling of dread lest there should be a terrible reckoning between the man she had so fearfully wronged and herself, if her complicity in the matter was discovered. She found out that Selby entertained some idea of going away from New York ; of leaving the scene where he had enjoyed so much happiness and such untold misery. She at once took advantage of this to influence some mutual friends, in order to urge on Selby the advisability of a change for his health's sake, and ere many days she had the satisfaction of knowing that he had taken his departure, to remain away for a year or longer. Then she wrote to Minna the letter mentioned in the last chapter.

Selby was unable to induce Tim to accompany him abroad. The faithful servant would not desert the cause of his mistress, and told his master so plainly. "She will come back, sir, I know she will, and I'm going to stay here to receive her. If I had only some idea where she went to, I'd follow her ; but I'm off her track altogether, and so I'll stop right here, sir ; she's sure to come back

sometime, if the Lord spares her." Selby, although he dismissed the rest of the servants at the "Oaks," never thought of discharging Tim, but gave him charge of the place.

"Well," said the latter, when his master had gone, "here I am a second time left to take care of a big house. I wonder what's going to happen this time?"

Mrs. Rolph had set out for Chicago to see Minna the very next day after she had mailed the letter; but, as we already know, she found the bird had flown when she visited the cottage. She had passed Minna on the way, and was very much disturbed at this unexpected state of affairs. She had hoped to have induced Minna to keep away from New York, by fair promises of writing to Selby, and bringing about a reconciliation; but here the wife had taken the matter in her own hands. She was somewhat at a loss to know what to do. Fate, however, kept Selby and his wife apart.

When Minna arrived in New York, the first thing she did was to visit the publishing house in which Selby still held a partnership. She went there to see the senior partner, with whom she had always been a favorite. He was a fine, kind-hearted old gentleman, with silvery hair and a noble benign countenance, and as she entered the office he rose politely, without, however, recognizing his visitor, so greatly had Minna changed.

When she spoke, he knew her voice instantly, and then he looked with pity on the pale, earnest, beseeching face of the poor woman before him.

"Mrs. Selby!" he exclaimed, "I did not know you, you are so altered. What has been the matter?"

"I have been very ill," said Minna; "I have come to find out where my husband is."

"Why did you go away, Mrs. Selby? Why did you break up the poor fellow's home and wreck your own happiness at the same time."

"I went away because I thought I was going to my sick husband. I received a letter which I supposed to be from him, but which I now know was a cruel forgery."

"Dear me! dear me! there is some great mistake somewhere. Something very wrong," said the old gentleman. "Mr. Selby told me he had received a letter from you saying that you had left him."

"I never wrote such a letter," said Minna.

"Dear me! dear me! this is dreadful work. Have you the letter—the forged document, I mean?"

"No," answered Minna, "I lost it. I thought I had it in my satchel when I left the 'Oaks,' but I must have dropped it somewhere in the hurry and confusion I was in."

"This is bad—very bad. I wish you had that letter."

"You don't suppose George will doubt my word," said Minna, rather indignantly.

"Oh! dear, no, I don't mean that; but then, the truth is, Mr. Selby showed me your letter to him, and I declare I never saw so clever a forgery. I know your handwriting very well, Mrs. Selby, and I could have sworn it was your writing. The whole matter is inexplicable."

"But I must write to George at once. He must return, you know, and hear me. He will believe me. I would have come sooner, but I was so ill."

"What was the matter, my dear?" the old gentleman was very fatherly in his way to Minna. "Tell me what was the matter."

Minna blushed deeply at the recollection of where

she had been when the accident happened. "I fell," she said, "and cut my head, and then I had brain fever. They thought I would die."

"Poor little woman! poor little woman! how you must have suffered. You look as if you had been very ill; but I am so glad you are back all safe,—it is a dreadful business."

"Will you send a letter for me to George, please?" asked Minna.

"Of course I will; but really I am puzzled to know how or where to catch him. He left with no definite route laid out for himself. He was very unsettled, and will not be likely to remain any time in one place. But we'll try, we'll try."

"I would like to write at once."

"Very well, my dear, very well. You can come in here," opening the door of his sanctum, "and you will not be disturbed; you will be nice and quiet."

Minna gratefully accepted the old gentleman's offer, and there wrote a long and touching letter to her husband, giving him the whole story of her abduction; how ill she had been, and how she longed to see him once more.

When the letter was addressed to where the old gentleman thought it would find Selby, Minna felt a great relief. She was willing to wait now. She felt confident her husband would not delay his coming when he received that epistle.

"And now," said the old gentleman, "you must go at once to the 'Oaks.' All the servants are away, but you can soon obtain fresh ones." (He forgot to mention about Tim.)

"Oh! no," said Minna, "I could not go there yet,

not until George comes. I couldn't go there while he thinks me so bad. He will take me back to the 'Oaks' himself."

"Tut! tut! tut!" exclaimed the kind-hearted old man, "the whole thing is a misunderstanding, caused by some very wicked person indeed. Your husband's house is the proper place for you, Mrs. Selby."

But Minna remained unmoved in her determination. She was very proud—she would not even accept assistance from her husband's partner. She was resolved, if necessary, to work for her living until such time as her husband took her back of his own free will, which she knew he would do as soon as he learned the truth.

Minna left the publishing house a happier woman than she had entered it. She promised the senior partner to call frequently until a letter came from Selby; but she would receive no favor at his hands. She would not even consent to go and stay at his house, as he wanted her to do. She went away with the firm resolution to work her own way, until her good name was vindicated by her husband's taking her back of his own will to her old home. But Minna yearned to see the "Oaks" once more; and though she would not go to live there, she longed to look upon the dear old place, and so when she returned to the private boarding-house where she and her two companions had engaged rooms, she said to the "Amazon," "Come and see my home. We will go and look at the dear place where I spent so many happy hours." And so Minna, accompanied by Nell (whose nickname of the "Amazon" we will omit hereafter in describing the good life she was entering upon), drove out in the direction of the "Oaks," the girl Liz not feeling well enough to go with them.

Tim was standing smoking his pipe near the lodge gate when he observed the two women descend from the carriage and walk towards him. One of the strangers seemed to be pointing out the attractions of the place to the other; and as they stopped and looked over the low iron railing into the grounds, Tim remarked,

"Well, it's two women this time. What the devil do they want? It's just the way Solomon John commenced his pranks. I don't want to have anything to do with women, though; but these two are up to some game, I do believe."

He, however, thought there would be no harm to investigate the matter; and so he opened the lodge gate and approached them.

Minna was busy describing the beauties of the "Oaks" to Nell as Tim came up, when hearing his footsteps she hastily turned to see who it was. When she saw her old servant, she was so pleased to look upon a familiar face—she was so delighted to meet one who had always been so true and loyal to her—that she sprang towards him.

"Oh! Tim," she exclaimed, "I never expected you were here—I am so glad to see you."

"My God! it is the mistress," and Tim looked at Minna as if doubting his senses, and in his astonishment forgetting to pay her the usual mark of respect by touching his hat.

"Yes, Tim, it is me; but I suppose you think me greatly changed."

"I don't believe I would have known you; but I knew you'd come back—I always said you'd come back—hurrah for me," and Tim, in the exuberance of his feelings, threw his cap in the air. Then he remembered the

presence of his mistress. "Please excuse me, Mrs. Selby, but I'm the happiest man in the whole world, I am so proud to see you back again."

"I haven't come back to stay, Tim, not yet."

"You haven't come back to stay!" exclaimed Tim, aghast. "Why? I'll have the servants all back before sundown, ma'am; that needn't stop you."

"It is not that, Tim; I won't return to the 'Oaks' until Mr. Selby returns."

The features of Tim, which had been illumined by joy, now appeared quite downcast.

"Excuse me, ma'am, for having kept you out here when I ought to have been showing you to the house," and he moved off towards the lodge gate.

"Yes, Tim, I will go in; there can be no harm in looking at the dear place; besides, I want to speak to you. Come, Nell."

Nell had been standing in astonishment at the conduct of Tim, and her great heart warmed to him when she saw how devoted he was to his mistress.

Minna walked slowly up the long broad avenue, and as she thought of how she had left her home, the misery she had endured ever since, and the pleasant days she had spent at the "Oaks" both before and after her marriage, she could not restrain her tears when she looked around her and saw how quiet and deserted everything appeared; and as the image of her husband rose to her mind away in a foreign land, with no one near him to love him, alone and deeming himself forsaken, while she herself was like an outcast, her emotion overcame her, and she wept like a child.

Tim wished he could sink out of sight when he witnessed the distress of his mistress; he could not bear to see her suffer.

When Tim had opened the great hall door Minna showed Nell into the drawing-room, and asking her to remain there a few minutes, she turned to Tim and said that she wished to speak to him in the library.

Tim at once led the way for his mistress, and opening the door, waited respectfully until she had passed in, after which he followed and stood with his hat in his hand, while she sank into one of the large arm-chairs.

Minna then told Tim the whole story, how she had gone to Chicago on the strength of the forged letter, how she had been decoyed there by Holt, her accident and long sickness, and wound up by saying that she had written to Mr. Selby, but that she would not come to live at the "Oaks" until her husband brought her there himself.

Tim was greatly touched at the recital of her wrongs, and he then described the scene where Holt had been killed, and how Mrs. Rolph had professed ignorance of Minna's whereabouts. Minna was horrified to hear of Holt's dreadful death, and her suspicions were aroused in regard to Mrs. Rolph. She remembered the strange disappearance of the forged letter, the unaccountable presence of Mrs. Rolph at Mrs. Leech's, and her subsequent actions in regard to Selby and herself. She began to suspect that the widow had some motives in all that she had done, and that it was not of a friendly nature to either her or her husband.

She said to Tim, "I am afraid Mrs. Rolph has not been a true friend to us."

Tim clinched the matter when he said, "I always used to warn my master against her, for I knew she had no good feelings for him. She was disappointed that he did not marry her—that was the trouble."

Tim then did his utmost to persuade his mistress to

live at the "Oaks," but she would not consent to do so. At last he received permission to go with her back to the city, and to visit her every day. Minna then visited every part of the house, and in her own room she lingered for some time. While there, she closed and locked the doors, and sinking on her knees by the bedside she poured forth her feelings to the Almighty, and sobbing while she prayed, she besought her Maker to watch over and guard her absent husband and to unite them once more. It was a fervent prayer—was it answered? we will see.

As she turned to leave the room her eye fell on her bible, the gift of her mother, which had remained untouched on the table by her bed during her long and miserable absence.

Surely there can be no harm in taking this, and kissing the book, she carried it with her.

"See, Tim," she said as she met the faithful servant in the hall, "I am taking this, it was my mother's."

When Minna and Nell drove back to their boarding-house Tim sat on the box with the driver.

CHAPTER XXX.

TIM now proved of valuable assistance to Minna in many ways, and through his exertions comfortable rooms were obtained, where she and her two companions could live retired and at small expense. It had occurred to Minna to ask Nell how the means were procured to pay the expenses while she was in Chicago, and the girl at once told her that Mrs. Rolph had supplied her with the money. This could not be repaid at once, but Minna resolved that no further assistance should come from that quarter. Then the cottage with its furniture in Chicago had to be disposed of, and the proceeds handed back to Mrs. Rolph. Minna did not wish the girls to leave her, she having made up her mind to be a protectress to them for the rest of their lives; and as something had to be done immediately Tim was just the one to do it.

It was therefore arranged that he should go to Chicago with power to sell the furniture, and hand over the cottage to the landlord; and accordingly he started on his errand without delay.

Nell had still a portion of the money left which Mrs. Rolph had given her, and Minna did not scruple to use this until at least she had an opportunity to earn more. But she calculated that it would not be very long ere

her husband would return, when she would be able to repay the widow her money, and the necessity for earning more would be avoided. She was, however, doomed to be disappointed, and her sufferings were by no means so near an end as she imagined.

Tim went to Chicago as he had been directed, and had no difficulty in finding either the cottage or its landlord. When he saw the latter, however, he was surprised to hear that a lady had already been making inquiries about the furniture, and that she claimed to have an interest in it. Tim at once concluded that Mrs. Rolph was not far distant, and as he wished particularly to speak to that lady, he took the trouble to find out where she was staying.

The widow was more than astonished when she received a visit from Tim. She was at first alarmed. She thought Selby must have returned, and, having learned the whole particulars of the outrage committed on him and his wife, had sent his servant to demand an interview with her. She determined, however, to brave it out. There was only the letter which Minna had written, and which she had stolen and afterwards sent to Selby, which could at all implicate her. She had destroyed the forged letter she had written in the name of Selby to his wife, asking her to come to Chicago; and although she knew Minna would blame her as the only one who could have used the other letter, she resolved to deny any connection with it. Nothing could be proved against her. What need she care, now that Holt was dead. She therefore met Tim with a face as unconcerned as if nothing troubled her.

Tim was prepared for this.

"I was sent by my mistress," he said, "to hand over

to you the furniture in that cottage which you lent her when she was here."

Mrs. Rolph was taken aback for a moment. She was about to deny any knowledge of it, but decided that it would be better not to do so.

"Yes," she replied, "I did furnish a cottage in order to take Mrs. Selby out of a very disreputable house here. It is very strange how she ever came to be in such an awkward position for a lady."

"There's nothing strange about it," said Tim, bluntly; "she was taken there under false pretences by a couple of very disreputable people."

Mrs. Rolph colored, and her eyes flashed for an instant. She knew that Tim intended the remark to apply to her. She replied, however, quite calmly, "Indeed, I was not aware of it. What could have been their object?"

"The object was petty, mean, dirty spite. It was to satisfy the revenge of a disappointed woman, Mrs. Rolph."

"Well, I am very sorry for it," replied the widow; "but really it does not concern me so much that you should come here to tell me all the troubles of the Selby family."

"It concerns you just this much, Mrs. Rolph, that I have come here to warn you not to try any more tricks on my mistress."

"You insolent rascal," cried the widow, almost beside herself with rage at this bold stroke of Tim's, "what do you mean? leave the room this very instant."

"All right," said Tim, rising and moving towards the door; "but I came here as a friend. You see I'm

an important witness if this thing ever comes to court. I saw you steal that letter."

Mrs. Rolph turned white and trembled. "You saw me steal a letter!"

"Yes, ma'am, that's what I said. You stole it from my mistress."

Now Tim had seen nothing of the sort; but when Minna had told him of the loss of the letter which she had accepted as coming from her husband, and how Mrs. Rolph had offered to place it in the satchel, he concluded that the widow had kept it; and so boldly asserted that he had seen her take it. Now Mrs. Rolph remembered perfectly well that Tim had been absent with his master on that occasion, a fact which he had not calculated on her knowing. Mrs. Rolph, therefore, thought that Tim referred to the letter which Minna had written, and which she, instead of destroying, had placed in her bosom. Tim's stroke therefore struck home.

"Will you explain yourself," she said, a little less defiantly, "you have made a serious charge."

"Well, ma'am, you see I've an unfortunate habit of always prying about, and I happened to see you and my mistress together. I was just outside in the hall, and I saw you take a letter, which I know belonged to her, and hide it on your person. I heard and saw everything," concluded Tim, as if to dismiss the subject.

"Who would believe such a thing?" said Mrs. Rolph mockingly.

"A jury would, ma'am, when I stated it on oath," answered Tim. "I've never said anything about it, although I ought to have done so; for you know there's

been queer letters passing to and fro lately ; but I came here as your friend. You don't want me, so I'll go."

"Stay," said Mrs. Rolph, "are you really my friend, Tim ?"

"Yes, ma'am, on one condition."

"Name it."

"If you promise to leave my mistress alone for the future—no more tricks on her."

"If I promise, will you never hint at what you have just said to me ?"

"I'll be mum as a mouse, ma'am ; but I would advise you to keep out of my master's way for a while ; he's coming home."

"When will he return ?" asked the widow.

"He's expected every day."

"You are altogether wrong, Tim, in supposing that I ever harmed your mistress ; but I don't wish you to speak about me as you have done. It might lead people to think that I am a dreadful person. You may rest easy about me and what you call my tricks, for I am going abroad. Will that satisfy you ?"

"Yes, ma'am ; and now about the furniture. Here is the key of the cottage," saying which Tim handed it to Mrs. Rolph, and departed, feeling quite sure that he had frightened the widow so as to keep her quiet for a time at least.

When Tim returned to New York he told Minna how he had met Mrs. Rolph and handed over to her the cottage and furniture, which, he said, was the easiest method to repay her ; but he never referred to his having accused her of stealing a letter, he retained that information for some future occasion. All Tim wanted for the present was to prevent Mrs. Rolph from doing any more

secret injury to his mistress, and that he believed he had accomplished.

Mrs. Rolph had really been contemplating a trip to Europe as soon as she had made things safe for herself in the Selby matter. Tim's visit hastened her departure, especially when she learned that Selby was on his way home, and expected every day. She therefore returned to New York, made her arrangements, and took the next steamer for England.

Selby, however, did not return immediately. Day after day, week after week passed, and no word came from him. One or two communications, of a business nature, were received from him by the senior partner; but in them he made no mention of ever having received Minna's letter, nor did he even refer to her at all. He was travelling from place to place, and found the excitement of constant change more agreeable than if he were to remain any time in one place. He did not say when he would return, but the tone of his letters implied that he had no intention of shortening his stay in Europe.

Minna, in the mean time, grew very despondent, as day after day passed and no reply to her letter came. She could not understand it. She still had implicit faith that her husband would believe her story, but his continued silence finally began to prey heavily on her mind. Tim never allowed a day to pass without visiting his mistress; and when he saw that she would receive no pecuniary assistance from any one, but was determined to earn her living, he interested himself to procure such work for her as she was able to do, and for which he always managed to get handsome remuneration. He frequently contrived to slip in a few extra dollars without Minna's knowledge, and thus he was able to perform a

valuable service for his mistress in a way she could not object to. Tim, however, when soliciting ladies' work never allowed it to be known who it was for. He invariably said it was to assist a relative of his, and as he always carried away the articles and brought them back when finished, no one had any idea that Mrs. Selby was doing needlework for her living. The two girls, Nell and Liz, assisted Minna, and as Tim attended to all the outdoor work for them, and acted as errand boy and caterer, they were able to spend a very quiet, and, if Minna had enjoyed good spirits, a very pleasant time. It was new life to Nell and Liz, who, being free from any annoyance or insult, or from having to face the sneers of the world, or the disappointments which but for Tim they might have had to endure, were quite happy and contented.

Minna, however, began to droop and fade. The color which had begun to return to her cheeks now disappeared once more, and Nell felt for the poor suffering woman, whom she had learned to love so dearly. Still, hope in the breast of Minna sustained her from giving way altogether, and as the days went by her attention was diverted partially from her own troubles by observing the decline of one of her companions.

As we have already mentioned, the girl Liz was not strong. She was of a delicate constitution. While living a life of shame the excitement had sustained her for the time being; but imperceptibly there had been a heavy strain upon her health, which, now that she was experiencing a quiet life, began to tell upon her.

Liz also suffered keenly the pangs of regret and remorse as she remembered the unhappiness she had caused a fond father and mother by the downward course she had pursued. Her parents, she believed, were still

alive, but she knew that they must be heart-broken at the disgrace she had brought upon them. Poor girl! it had not been of her own seeking, but she had listened to the voice of the tempter. She had defied the wishes of her father, whose better judgment had caused him to warn her against the very man who accomplished her ruin. She had never seen her parents since the day she had run away from home, but now she longed to look upon their faces—to ask their forgiveness; but she could not find courage to do it; and so she yearned for a mother's love while she pined away under her remorseful feelings.

Both Minna and Nell were pained to see the great change which was coming over Liz. She seemed to fade away day by day; and as her face became more pinched and wan, her disposition grew more and more gentle. The rooms they occupied were very bright and cheerful, and comfortably furnished, thanks to Tim's exertions and foresight, and every day the three women would sit and sew while they chatted pleasantly together. Had there been no vain regrets, no unpleasant memories to look back on—had there not been hope deferred which maketh the heart sick, Minna and her two companions would have been happy and contented in their new life. They went out very little, only when obliged to do so to make purchases, or when Minna went to inquire for a letter from her husband; and in the evenings Tim would join the little circle, and, at the request of his mistress, sit and listen while she read aloud to them. It was a peaceful home for the two girls who had spent the few previous years of their life in boisterous and sinful excitement, and the pleasant change was very grateful to them.

At last Liz grew so weak, and suffered so much from pain in her chest, that Minna and Nell insisted upon her discontinuing work. They procured for her a large easy-chair, and there she would recline amongst the pillows which Nell fondly arranged for her, and her large wistful eyes would look so mournful and sad at times, that Minna, to cheer her up, would drop her sewing and read for hours to her, while Nell would ply her needle with renewed energy, to do enough work for all three. There was a firm bond of union between these women. It was the bond of a sincere sympathy for each other; it was the bond of a true love. Nell used to ponder over the change that had come over her and Liz. In the bond of union that existed between her and her companions, she felt strong enough to defy the scorn of the whole world. "I am getting at the secret of fallen woman's reformation," she would think. "I'll find it out yet before long. I believe there is a way for us to acquire hope. I do think there is a chance for us poor girls after all."

One day, when Minna had gone to make her accustomed inquiry for a letter from her husband, and while Nell was sitting beside Liz sewing, the latter said in an earnest eager way—

"Nell, I don't think I am going to last very long, I feel myself growing weaker and weaker every day; but I don't fear death now as I would have done not very long ago, only there's one wish I have. Oh! Nell, if I could only get it, I'd die perfectly happy."

"Don't talk of dying, Liz," said Nell gently. "You will be all right and strong again. You want rest, that's all—you've overworked yourself, poor thing."

"No, Nell! I'll never be stronger than I am—I will never get better, I feel it."

"You want change, that's it," said Nell. "These are nice enough rooms, but it's the city air that's hurting you. Mrs. Selby and I were just talking about it yesterday, and we've decided to take you out in the country, where you'll have fresh air and see the green fields—that will bring you round all right."

"I will never leave these rooms, Nell, until I'm carried away to my long home," said Liz, mournfully.

"Why, Liz, girl, what's come over you? You make me shiver to hear you talk like that. You're down-hearted, now you must cheer up—it won't do to give way like this, it's bad for most any one."

"I know I'm down-hearted, Nell, but there's one thing could make me happy. Oh! if I could only get it."

"What is it, Liz? what is it, girl? we'll get it for you if it can be got; what is it?"

"If I could only see my poor dear mother, Nell, and my father. If I could only have their forgiveness I would die happy—I would not wish to live."

"We'll send for them; we'll get Mrs. Selby to write; we'll do it to-day," said Nell; "and we'll send Tim to fetch them. What on earth would we poor women have done if it hadn't been for that kind-hearted chap? I declare, he's a good soul."

"Indeed he is; but do you think they would come, Nell, after all I've done? Oh! I am afraid they cannot forgive me."

"'Deed they will," said Nell encouragingly, "wait till you see the letter Mrs. Selby will write. Of course they'll come. Where do they live?"

"Oh! if they should be dead! I have not heard anything about them for a long time. My old home is near Ogdensburg, in this state."

"Well, then, my dear girl, just rest easy; we'll have Tim off to-morrow with a letter to fetch them. I know Mrs. Selby will let him go."

When Minna returned, Nell told her the wish which Liz had expressed, and she at once agreed to write the required letter, and Tim was despatched the next day to find the old people, and with him he took a most touching appeal from the repentant girl to her parents written by his mistress.

Liz now grew feverishly excited until she could learn whether her parents were alive, and whether they would come to see her, and the doctor who was attending her told Minna and Nell that he had grave fears that it would result fatally to her. When they told him the cause of her agitation, he said that joy was as likely to kill her as disappointment.

Nell and Minna, therefore, did their utmost to comfort and soothe the poor girl, and their anxiety for her became very great, as Tim's return was delayed beyond the expected time.

She had grown so weak that she was unable to take her accustomed place in the big arm-chair, but lay propped up with pillows in her bed. She looked very frail, and her eyes, which were unnaturally bright, had a touching expression in them, a wistful longing look, as if all the hope of her ebbing life was concentrated in the one great desire of her soul to see the loved ones before she died. Minna and Nell now realized that they were about to lose their companion; and though they were sad at the thought of her approaching death, it was a great comfort for them to know that she would die a reformed woman, repentant, and looking forward to a brighter home in Heaven. Through the efforts of a mis-

sionary, a good man who found them out and visited the sick girl regularly, she had been led to make her peace with God. The only thing wanting to make her death-bed a perfectly happy one was the presence and forgiveness of her parents, whom she felt she had wronged so deeply. Oh! how the poor girl looked forward to their coming! how fervently she prayed for it, how wistfully she watched the door, expecting it every minute to open and admit her aged father and mother.

Her prayer was answered. At last Tim made his appearance, and with him came a white-haired, venerable looking old man, and an elderly lady with a sweet placid face.

As they entered the room Liz tried to speak, but her emotion was too great, her strength utterly failed her, her head sank back on the pillows, as her poor old mother clasped her in her arms.

"My poor child—my poor lost dear—my own darling—I have found you at last; look up, my darling, it is your poor old mother, who has mourned for you so long. Oh! friends (turning to Nell and Minna), she is not dead, is she?"

Nell came forward, and gently taking the poor girl from the arms of the disconsolate mother, she tenderly raised her and administered a cordial to her, which had the effect of reviving her.

The old father had sank into the arm-chair, and covering his face with his trembling hands was sobbing bitterly.

"Oh! mother—father," gasped Liz, when she could speak, "will you forgive me? I have made you suffer. I have suffered myself."

The tears were rolling down the cheeks of the old

lady, as she again took the dying girl in her arms and pressed her gently to her bosom.

"My poor, ill-used girl; why didn't you come back to us—when—when—he deceived you? Your home was always open to you; your room has never been used since; it is waiting for you just the same as the day you left it."

"Oh! mother," cried Liz.

"Isn't it, John? (turning to the old gentleman.) Come, John, and see our poor girl."

The old father arose, and going to the bedside kissed the brow of his daughter, and as he did so he left tears of forgiveness on her brow. "My dear daughter, what your mother says is true. We have longed for your face all this weary time."

"Oh! then, I am happy now. I dared not return, mother; I could not hope for forgiveness; but I can die happy now. Oh! so happy, mother!" and Liz pressed her warm cheek close to her mother's breast; she was a child once more, at rest from trials and troubles. It was her last glimpse of happiness on earth, ere she entered the portals from which there is no returning.

"Nell," she said, hardly above a whisper, "Mrs. Selby, kiss me before I go. Oh! Nell, we have passed through dreadful times; but they are all over now. God bless you, Nell, for being so good to me, and you, Mrs. Selby, you will be happy soon; and I—Oh! I am so happy, dear, dear mother."

Tim had stood it as long as he could; but he had to leave the room. Minna and Nell were heart-broken, as they pressed the thin hands of their friend, and kissed her a last, a long good-by.

"Mother," said Liz, in a low tone, "press me close

to you; I am so cold, dear mother, dear father—closer, mother—I am so happy."

"My poor child!" said the old lady, as she stooped to press a kiss upon her daughter's brow.

Poor Liz was dead.

Let us close the scene on the distress of the old father and mother, and the grief of Minna and Nell; and in the words of Whittier we will write:—

"By the holy love He beareth—
By the bruised reed He spareth,—
O may He, to whom alone
All her cruel wrongs are known,
Still her hope and refuge prove,
With a more than mother's love."

CHAPTER XXXI.

We must now change the scene from America to Australia, in order to follow Richard Grey in his wanderings. He had, on his arrival in Melbourne, succeeded in realizing a large sum from the sale of his daughter's jewels, and with this he had been able to live in dashing style for a few months. But the round of dissipation in which he engaged soon caused his money to disappear, and then he found himself obliged once more to exert himself and use his wits, in order to procure the means of living. Before he had quite used up his money he resolved to visit the diggings, and it is just after his arrival amongst the miners that we find him. He had managed to buy a share in a claim which had every prospect of becoming a lucrative one, and at once took his place to work in regular turn with his partners. He had not forgotten Langton, nor had he neglected to try and discover his whereabouts ; but during all the time he was in Melbourne he had not heard or seen anything of him. When he went to the diggings he almost gave up all hope of finding him, and for the time being he lost interest in the search for the missing gambler, as the prospect of becoming rich through mining presented itself before him.

The claim which he and his partners were working was one which had been partly worked when they

bought it, and they had found indications of gold by excavating. These indications finally led to their tunneling towards a neighboring claim, the owners of which were just as eager for the precious metal as Grey and his companions. No time was therefore to be lost in carrying on the work, and Grey, as soon as he became a partner in the claim, found no time to look about him ere he was engaged with pick and spade.

One day it was his turn to descend the shaft, and he was busy on his knees working in the tunnel, when he thought he heard a succession of dull thuds right ahead of him. He stopped to listen, and sure enough he plainly heard the blows. He was convinced in a moment that the sounds came from some other miner, working near him, down in the bowels of the earth. It seemed to his ear, as he listened, that the digger could not be more than a foot or two away from him, and he therefore redoubled his energies in order to make the most of his time in case the tunnel was broken into, when further progress would be stopped.

Suddenly the point of a pick protruded, and a small aperture appeared. Then Grey gave a blow and the hole was enlarged; another stroke from the stranger and the faces of the diggers appeared to each other, and a hearty salutation was on the lips of each, when, in a moment, they recognized one another—

"Grey!"

"Langton!'

On the face of the former there was a scowl, and on that of the latter a look almost of fear.

"I've been looking for you a long time," said Grey.

"Have you?" replied Langton. "Well, you've found me; what do you want?"

"I don't see that we can settle our business here," said Grey.

"If it's fight, there's nothing to prevent it," said Langton, in a mocking tone; "I'm ready."

"We had better come to an understanding first, and we can fight afterwards, if necessary," answered Grey. "Where's your camp?"

"Next to yours, I should say," was the reply, "when we meet here. I haven't worked through the earth a mile or so to get to this spot."

"Then let's quit work and meet up above," said Grey.

"I guess we'll meet lower down before long," remarked Langton, with a mocking laugh; "but we'll go up first."

The two men then retired to the bottom of their respective shafts, and were hauled up.

As soon as their fellow-miners were informed of the reason for stopping work, and after a consultation had been held between all the parties concerned for the purpose of arriving at an adjustment of the difficulty, Grey took Langton to one side.

"Langton," he said, "it is now a long time since we met, and I've something particular to say to you; will you take a walk with me? I don't want to speak before these fellows——just now."

"So far as I am concerned, we can talk right here," replied Langton, almost defiantly; "but I've no objection to go where you please."

"It's better to say what we've got to say alone, at first," said Grey; "perhaps we can arrange matters quietly, without a row."

"All right," said Langton, "let us go;" and the two

men walked away to a secluded spot a little distance from the camp.

Then Grey turned to Langton, and said: "You won a great deal of money from me, Langton. I suppose you know you ruined me?"

"I suppose I played better than you," replied Langton; "gamblers can't win always. You had your share of good luck, too, in your time. Why do you grudge mine?"

"I always gave a man a chance to win his money back," said Grey; "did you treat me that way?"

"I think I did," said Langton, coolly. "You cleaned me out pretty well the last time I played with you, if I remember aright."

"Yes," said Grey, bitterly, "and I suppose you know how I happened to clean you out on that one occasion?"

"Luck, I daresay," was the reply.

"No," said Grey, fiercely, "it was because you had not the opportunity of cheating me as you had done before that evening."

"Hold on, Grey; not so fast. This is not a country for men to call each other cheats."

"You can tell the truth in any country," said Grey, now getting fairly roused. "I always thought you played a fair game. I never imagined you were a swindler until I met Bill Brown in New York. He told me the whole story, Langton; you needn't try to deny it any longer."

"My word is as good as Bill Brown's," said Langton, sullenly. "Is this all you had to say to me when you brought me here? If so, I guess I'll return to camp."

"You'll stop here, Langton, till I've finished with you," said Grey, firmly. "I've something more to say.

I haven't travelled all this distance after you to let you slip now."

Langton seemed inclined to move away; then he apparently changed his mind. "Say on, Grey, but be quick about it; mining gives a fellow an appetite, and I'm hungry."

"Langton," said Grey, "there is no use fencing any longer with me. I want my money back. I know all about how you swindled me out of it. I can prove it by more witnesses than Bill Brown. If you don't pay me back what you regularly stole from me, so help me God, I'll expose you in every camp in Australia. I'll follow you as long as I live, till I drag it out of you."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Langton, "you'll have a nice time doing it. Do you suppose I care for such a childish threat? Do you think the miners will believe you more than me? Do you imagine they will take up our quarrel? Pshaw! Grey, don't be a fool."

"Then I'll take up my own quarrel. You won't escape me," exclaimed Grey, angrily taking a step forward.

In a moment Langton had placed his hand on his hip to grasp his pistol, the next he was seized by the throat and hurled to the ground by the infuriated Grey.

It was a fearful struggle. They fought like demons. Each knew that he could expect no mercy from the other. Each tried to reach his pistol but was prevented by the other. Grey's dissipation now told fearfully against him. At first his rage and the excitement of the moment gave him an unnatural strength, but it did not last. He found himself becoming exhausted, while his antagonist gave no sign of yielding. Suddenly Langton made a desperate effort and succeeded in freeing

himself from Grey's grasp. The next moment Richard Grey was struggling on his back, while his antagonist held him by the throat with his knees pressed upon his breast. Tighter and tighter did Langton contract his fingers on the throat of the man he now had at his mercy. Richard Grey's struggles became more and more feeble, his eyes grew bloodshot and seemed as if they would start out of their sockets, and his face assumed a deep purple hue.

Langton slowly drew his revolver with one hand while with the other he held his victim down. "I don't want to choke you like a dog," he said through his clenched teeth and in a voice full of hate, "but you've got to die. If I spare you now that you are in my power you'll not spare me if you ever get a chance. This world can't hold us both."

Saying which he coolly placed the pistol to the forehead of Grey, there was a dull report, a spasmodic struggle, and Richard Grey passed to his long account.

Langton sprang to his feet, and looking fearfully around, darted off in an opposite direction from the camp.

The body of Richard Grey was not discovered until a couple of days afterwards, and during that time Langton was able to make good his escape. The murder soon passed out of the mind of the people, and the murderer was never called upon to answer for his crime.

Thus ended the career of a man who had lived a cold selfish life, whose feelings were never enlisted in the cause of either justice or sympathy for others. He lived but for himself. He died unregretted by friends, unmourned in a strange land.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE parents of Liz took her body with them to Ogdensburg, and there the poor girl was buried in the family grave. Minna and Nell missed their companion very much, and Tim found the abode of his mistress a very sad one when he visited it. He, however, continued his good offices with unabated zeal, and tried in every way to make things cheerful. Nell appeared to be able, during these days, to endure any amount of fatigue, for she insisted in not only performing her own part of the work, but she very frequently relieved Minna from her share, when she saw her growing paler and thinner each day from the anxiety and harrowing suspense she experienced when no word came from Mr. Selby. Nell began to think she would lose Minna as she had lost Liz, and she would often ponder over her probable fate if such an event took place. It seemed as if Minna was the tie which bound her to a good life, and if it was broken, she sometimes thought she was not yet strong enough to continue the good course she was following. She feared that if left to herself she could not yet combat the scoffs and jeers of the world, nor the disappointments and sufferings she might be subjected to. Physically, Nell was very strong; morally, she was still weak, and (which is not generally the case with people) she knew and acknowledged her inward weakness. She loved

Minna dearly, she regarded her as one whose influence would ever keep her in the right path, and whose loss might be the means of separating her from the pleasant, happy life she was leading. She therefore watched the evident decline of Minna with anxious eyes, and spared no pains to make life easy for her suffering companion.

As days grew into weeks, and weeks into months, and still no word came from his master, Tim began to fear that something had happened to him. The senior partner also became anxious, and Minna drooped more and more. It seemed sometimes to her that the harm which had been done was destined to be irreparable; that the breach between her husband and herself would never be healed. But hope would come to her aid and whisper comfort to her heart. So long as no letter came to signify his continued belief in her guilt, so long as he did not refuse to take her back, Minna would not give way altogether. The only fear was that, when the time for reconciliation came, it would find her such a wreck that she would not live to enjoy her happiness.

Things went on as usual, however, so far as the routine of each day's existence went. Tim procured sufficient work, and Nell sewed for their daily bread, Minna helping her when she was able. In the evenings, Tim would pay his accustomed visit; there would be the usual reading, if Minna did not feel too weak for the effort, in which case Nell and Tim would play checkers, or the latter would keep them amused by relating the gossip of the day.

One evening, as Minna reclined in the large easy-chair which had been occupied by Liz when she was alive, Nell, who sat sewing by the window, remarked:

"Do you know, Mrs. Selby, I have been wondering

what I will do when the time comes for you and me to part?"

"I hope, Nell, I will be able to offer you a home. I cannot think that my husband has ever received my letter; I am sure he would not treat it with cruel indifference. If I should go back to the "Oaks" to live you will come with me."

"No, Mrs. Selby, I can never do that; I would not be happy there."

"Not happy, Nell!" exclaimed Minna; "oh, do not say that. There is nothing I would not do to make you happy."

"You are too good, Mrs. Selby, to ever do anything to make me unhappy; but I could not live with you, I'd be afraid all the time of being found out. Some one who knew me when I led the bad life might recognize me, and then look at the disgrace. Oh! no, that would never do. I would be in constant dread; it would be regular misery."

"You do not know how kind, how noble, my husband is; he is too good, almost; he would never allow you to be insulted, he would protect you."

"If a person openly insulted me, I think I could protect myself," said Nell with a flash of her old temper; "but that's not it, it is the covert sneer, the look of aversion from people that I dread; neither you nor your husband could prevent that."

"Poor Nell! it is the old story over again which you have told me so often."

"It is the mark set on us girls; but I'm beginning to see a way for me to get over the difficulty; I've been thinking of it a good deal lately, more than ever since Liz died."

"Poor Liz!" said Minna, "it is a great comfort to know that she was saved."

"Yes, thank God for that!" said Nell, fervently.

"Tell me your plans," said Minna.

"Well, you see, Mrs. Selby, we girls have great odds against us. People won't take us into their families to live for fear of hurting their wives and daughters. They won't employ us because they can't trust our honesty. No decent man will marry any of us; such a marriage would end in misery, and a girl with any pride left in her would never accept of charity. If a girl should try to reform, the distrust of the world would soon drive her back to her old way of living. I've thought of all these things, Mrs. Selby, and there's only one way that I see for girls to get even with the world."

"What is it, Nell?"

"To place the world under some obligation to them, ma'am."

"How?" asked Minna.

"I'll only speak of my own case, what I'm thinking of doing; but I've other plans which I'll tell you, for myself I'm going to be a nurse. I don't believe people will revile me when I'm tending the sick,—when I'm risking my life to do good to others, do you think they will? If they did, don't you think I could stand it better in that case?"

"This is like your good heart to think of such a plan."

"I don't know," said Nell. "I hate to go back to the old life, I dread the new one; it's the only way open that I see. But I'll want some help, I'll want some recommendation; perhaps you can help me in that."

"I'll help you any way I can," said Minna; "but I would prefer not to part from you."

"I've been thinking if some good ladies were to take

us poor girls up and protect us ; if they'd not be ashamed to openly encourage and help us, there are girls who'd gladly take to the life I'm speaking about. There are nurses wanted all the time. If the yellow fever strikes the South, there are nurses wanted. If war takes place, how useful they could be ; in our hospitals they can get plenty of work. All over the world there's sickness—there are accidents ; there are thousands of cases where nurses are wanted all the time. If there was a band formed from amongst us poor fallen women, would they revile us when they saw the good we were doing? I don't think human nature is so bad as to let them do it."

"Do you think, Nell, you could get girls to do as you say ? you know they'd be risking their lives."

"But they'd be saving their souls. Yes, Mrs. Selby, there are girls who would gladly do it to escape the bad life. I've seen poor women ready to kill themselves for remorse, and there are some who prefer to live on in shame. I think the 'Homes,' are good, but only for those who have fallen so low that it's a mercy to give them some place where they can die in peace or linger out their few remaining days."

Tim at this moment appeared, his face all aglow; he had important news for his mistress.

The senior partner had received a letter from Selby, saying that he would return home in a few weeks.

As Tim delivered his news the wan face of his mistress lit up with a joyful expression, then she asked :

"Did he mention me, Tim ?"

"No ! ma'am," was the sorrowful reply, "he did not; it's uncommon strange."

Minna's face fell for a moment but the next she smiled contentedly. "He never received my letter, but he is alive, he is coming home. I am satisfied."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MRS. ROLPH went to Europe, and while in Paris she succeeded, through some American acquaintances whom she met there, in obtaining the entrée to a very select circle in that gay city. Her great wealth gave her the means of living in handsome style, and her beauty made her a favorite with the Parisian gentlemen. She saw her opportunity to secure an exalted position in society, and she determined to avail herself of it. It was not long ere she had several suitors for her hand, but none of them answered her purpose, as they did not rank amongst the nobility. She did not require wealth so much as she coveted a title, and to gain the latter she was ready if necessary to sacrifice her feelings and her comfort. Amongst those who were attracted by her dazzling beauty was Comte de la Croix, and to him she resolved to surrender her hand whenever he should pluck up courage to ask it. To this end she encouraged the old man, who was evidently smitten with her charms, but who hesitated because he feared a refusal. He was dreadfully ugly, but he was estimated to be enormously rich, and then he was the Comte de la Croix, which in the eyes of Mrs. Rolph was above silver and gold, and compensated for the plainness of his personal appearance. He had been a thorough roué in his day; but he had become soured

and of a jealous disposition, three traits in his character, however, which the widow did not discover until it was too late.

It was not long ere the Comte de la Croix felt sufficiently emboldened to seek the gay widow in marriage, and to his delight, we may also say surprise, she accepted him. The idea of appearing before her New York friends as the countess was too great a trumph for her to refuse. She could defy Selby. She almost wondered that she had ever given herself as much trouble as she had done to be revenged on him. Her American friends sank into insignificance in her estimation, as she thought of her prospective title, and the proud position it would give her. How she would revel in her grandeur; and then her husband, he could not live many years to be a drag upon her liberty, and when he was dead she would still be the rich countess, free to make fresh conquests, and more likely to be sought after than ever. The prospect was one so suited to the tastes and desires of the widow, that it is no wonder she revelled in the contemplation of it.

The marriage therefore took place in due course, and was a most brilliant affair. It certainly surprised many how a man of the Comte de la Croix's age and extreme ugliness could have won a lady of Mrs. Rolph's beauty and known wealth; but they were not aware how much she coveted a position that would ensure her a standing in society. It was the bane of Mrs. Rolph's life lest some of her past sins might find her out, and hurl her from the pedestal on which she stood in the fashionable world.

The very day on which she was married she received news from New York, which blanched her cheeks and made her tremble at the consequences that might have

been entailed on her, if the misfortune had occurred a week or two earlier.

The banking-firm with whom most of her wealth was invested had failed. A large portion of her securities were worthless, and she, at a moment's notice, found herself deprived of nearly the whole of her private means. She was therefore altogether at the mercy of her husband, who, fortunately, was wealthy and able of himself to sustain the splendor in which she proposed to live. She never told the old Comte the misfortune which had happened to her ; and he, during the first few weeks of their married life, never grudged any expense which his beautiful wife desired to indulge in. He never inquired about her own private means, so long as he was infatuated with her ; but ere two months from the day of their marriage the old man was struck down by paralysis, from which he never recovered sufficiently to be able to move from his bed, and then a change came.

When prostrated and unable to participate in the gayeties of which his wife was so fond, the Comte began to wonder why she was so careful of her own means. He noticed that she never spent any money but that which she procured from him, and so he asked her one day the reason of it. She was then forced to acknowledge her poverty and dependence on his bounty ; and he, becoming aware of the fact that she loved the society of her friends more than attendance at his bedside, took advantage of her position to secure for himself her whole attention. He insisted upon her constant presence in the sick chamber, and to insure it told her plainly that if she neglected him in his helplessness he would so arrange his will that she would be left a penniless widow when he died. At first she could not credit that he

would carry out his threat ; but being a cunning woman, where her own interests were concerned, she one day thought of inquiring into the possibility of his keeping his word. She therefore interviewed her husband's confidential lawyer, and by her beauty and persuasive powers managed to induce him to let her into the secret of the will, and discovered to her horror that the old man had really inserted a clause which unless altered or annulled would deprive her of any participation in the Comte's fortune. Her husband had told her several times that unless she gave him her undivided attention while he lived he would will all his property away from her, but she had simply laughed at him. Now, however, she changed her tactics. She abandoned her gay life for the time being, and nursed the old man night and day, hardly leaving his chamber except to take required rest. The thought of being left in poverty was one she could not bear. Her title of Countess would be nothing without the means necessary for sustaining her rank. She would sooner die than be poor, and so she preferred becoming the slave of an old man to running the risk of not inheriting his wealth. The Comte de la Croix made her life one of real bondage while he lived ; and so exacting was he, that she more than once allowed the thought to cross her mind that it would be better to poison him than endure his cruelty. The only thing that saved the old man was the fact that he had not altered his will ; and he, probably divining her intentions, delayed changing it until the last moment. How that proud cruel woman hated that old man as she looked day after day on his wrinkled and ugly countenance as it seemed to gloat over her misery ! There was no alternative, however, but for her to comply with his wishes ; and so she

shut herself out from the world and nursed the old Comte, helping to prolong the life of a man whom she could have murdered at a moment's notice if it had suited her purpose. We will therefore leave this woman to the punishment she was undergoing, a punishment which was as nothing compared to what she was destined to experience ere her career came to an end.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

As the days wore on Minna became more and more anxious for the return of her husband. The news of his coming revived her spirits and caused a temporary improvement in her health; but as weeks passed, and still he came not, she grew despondent, while her anxiety to see him became so intense as to be almost unbearable. Nell looked forward almost with regret to the arrival of Selby, because she knew that it would be the signal for a separation between her and Minna; but when she observed the depressed state of mind into which her loved companion was thrown by the continued absence of her husband, she heartily sympathized with her and wished as much as any one for his return.

Poor Nell was beginning to feel a degree of happiness in her quiet peaceful home which she had never expected to experience after having fled from her father's house, and she dreaded the change which she saw would come when Minna left her. She realized that she would be obliged to face the cold world once more, and she trembled lest it might drive her back to her old life. She was in the mean time forming her plans, in order to be able to carry out the scheme which she had mentioned to Minna. It seemed to her that it was the only course left open for her to pursue; but she was not altogether sanguine whether it would prove to be as successful as she hoped. She was quite resolved

not to go to the "Oaks" to reside. She foresaw that she would never be happy there, because she never could feel perfectly free from the danger of discovery, and the consequent scorn which the knowledge of her previous life would call forth. She knew that even the servants in the house would be likely to show their dislike to come in contact with her, when the abandoned life she had led became known. She was aware that she could not submit to such treatment, and that it would probably end in driving her back to a life of sin. She also thought of Minna and her husband, and the disgrace that would fall upon them if it was discovered that they were harboring a fallen woman. She knew that Minna herself would care very little for the opinion of others in the matter, and it was possible that Mr. Selby would wish to protect her for his wife's sake; but she was also well aware that by doing so they would be likely to bring upon themselves the censure and displeasure of their friends. Nell would therefore not risk the chance of her being the cause of any further unhappiness in Minna's home, but at the same time she dreaded being left once more to her own resources.

Tim grew quite concerned for his mistress, and not a day passed that he did not visit the senior partner to obtain, if possible, good tidings for her. But each day he went to Minna with the same reply to her eager question, "Any good news for me, Tim?"

"No, ma'am, not a word from him; not a sight of him."

Thus the weary days passed, and Minna was becoming very thin and pale, and her countenance began to have a careworn look, from the constant strain on her mind and the disappointments caused by Selby's pro-

longed absence. Nell thought of how Liz commenced to droop and fade; and as she looked at Minna, she began to fear that it would not be long ere she too would be laid in the grave.

At last, one day, Tim made his appearance, and there was such a pleased expression on his face that Minna's heart throbbed with excitement to know whether he was the bearer of welcome news. The faithful servant knew that his mistress was so weak that it might be dangerous to give her a surprise, and he therefore restrained his impatience to tell her the glad tidings he had in store for her.

"Yes, ma'am, we've got word from him at last, and he'll be here soon."

"How soon, Tim? Oh! I hope there will be no more disappointments; I don't think I can wait much longer—it is killing me."

"But it's a sure thing, ma'am; quite a sure thing, I do assure you; he ain't far off now; but you must have courage, you know, you mustn't give in just as he's here."

"You are not saying this, Tim, are you, just to raise my spirits? you are quite sure he will be here soon?"

"As sure as I am standing here, ma'am, I got a message from the office, ma'am, and I'm just on my way there; but I thought I'd call in and let you know on my way. I'll go now, and I'll come back and tell you all about it."

"You are a good fellow, Tim," said Minna; "it was very thoughtful of you; but I won't keep you, and come back as quickly as you can, I am so impatient to know all."

Tim then left the room; but as he passed out, he beckoned to Nell to follow him, which she did at once.

When they were in the passage, Tim motioned to Nell to close the door, and when this was done he whispered to her.

"The master has come. He's up at the 'Oaks' now, and nobody but me knows he's back. He never sent me word to meet him, but he came right from the steamer to the house. He's awfully changed, I hardly knew him when I opened the hall door for him. Poor master and mistress, its been a dreadful turn for them both."

"Well, now, this is kind o' sudden; but why didn't you tell her?"

"I was feared to do it," said Tim; "I was feared it would come too quick like upon her. I thought I'd prepare her for it."

"You did right," said Nell; "you always do right, Tim."

"I'm much obliged for your good opinion, Nell; but now I'll be off and pretend to go to the office. When I come back I guess I can tell her."

"Do it gentle at first, Tim. I'll be on hand to help you."

"All right," said Tim as he descended the stairs.

Minna was very quiet when Nell returned to the room; but there was a bright look in her eyes and a slight flush on her cheeks, which plainly showed the state of eager expectation she was in.

Nell busied herself about the room, and said very little to Minna. She deemed it best to leave her to her own thoughts.

Minna only spoke once during Tim's absence. She said in a low tone:

"Oh! Nell, I do hope he will come soon."

"I have a feeling," replied Nell, "that he's close at hand. Keep your courage up, ma'am."

Tim did not remain away long, and on his return he lost no time in imparting his news.

"I think my master will be here to-night, Mrs. Selby."

"To-night!" exclaimed Minna, clasping her hands very tightly together. "Oh! Tim, do not deceive me."

"No, mistress, I wouldn't do that; I do think he'll be here."

"Yes, ma'am, I know he wouldn't say anything to hurt you, I wouldn't wonder if Mr. Selby is in New York and that Tim don't like to say so."

"You need not be afraid, Tim; I have waited so long it would be a mercy to tell me the truth now, I can bear it."

"Then, mistress, the master is here.—He's at the 'Oaks' this minute."

"At the 'Oaks,'" said Minna, much more calmly than Tim expected. "At the 'Oaks!' oh! how I have prayed for this moment;" then she bent her face over on her hands and sobbed, Nell and Tim standing by, but neither of them spoke a word. They felt that the tears were a Godsend, and that it was better to allow her to become calm ere they interrupted her. At last Minna looked up at Tim and asked very quietly:

"Did he ask for me, Tim? did he mention my name?"

"No, mistress, he did not. I don't believe he knows you are here. I do think he never got your letter. He looks so sad, so changed, you'd be sorry for him."

"Poor George!" exclaimed Minna, as the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"You'll come to the 'Oaks," won't you mistress, now

that master's home? I'll get a carriage, ma'am, if you're strong enough."

Minna hesitated a moment; then she said quite firmly: "Yes, Tim, I'll go to the 'Oaks.' I thought I would never go until he would take me there; but I will go with you. Something tells me it will be for the best. You can get the carriage; I know he will not refuse to hear me—he will believe me."

Tim required no second bidding. In a moment he was off for the carriage, and Nell hastened to assist Minna to dress.

In a short time the carriage was waiting at the door, and Tim, having seen his mistress safely seated in it with Nell, took his place alongside the driver, and directed him how to reach the "Oaks."

George Selby was seated in the library looking over some papers. He had returned to New York for the purpose of arranging some business matters that required his attention; but he did not intend to remain any length of time. As soon as he could leave again he proposed starting once more on his travels, as he found the roving life suited to his unsettled state of mind. He had never received Minna's letter, owing to the fact that he had never remained any time in one place, and, consequently, he had no knowledge of his wife's presence in New York. Tim had slipped out the moment he could get away from attendance on his master, and Selby was so engaged with his own sad thoughts that he never noticed his servant's absence. George Selby was indeed changed, not only in bodily appearance, but also in his character and mode of living. Instead of the gay, good-humored man of pleasure, he had become quiet, sad, and retiring in his disposition. He was no longer fond of

gambling. In fact he had taken an utter dislike to anything approaching it. He could not forget that it was chiefly owing to its baneful influence that he had been led to neglect his home and bring upon himself his present misery. He was beginning to devote his time more to literary labor than he had done before Minna's disappearance, and found in it some relief from the harrowing thoughts that oppressed him. In his personal appearance he had changed very much. His hair was rapidly turning gray, and his face had grown very thin and pale. His features had a drawn melancholy look about them, and his manner was so sad, so very quiet, that it is no wonder Tim hardly recognized him. The fact is, George Selby blamed himself for having caused Minna to leave home. He could not disabuse his mind of the idea that his wife would never have thought of deserting him had he not left her so much to herself and the evil influence of others; and he accused himself more than he did her for the unhappy state in which his home was placed. Minna was seldom out of his thoughts; and it was a source of anguish to him when he reflected that perhaps she was living in poverty and want, or abandoned to a life of misery by him who had taken her away, and that it was not in his (Selby's) power to rescue or assist her.

On this, the first evening of his return home, he felt his position dreadfully. The recollection of the many happy hours he had spent with Minna at the "Oaks," the many little souvenirs which he saw around him to remind him of his lost wife, and the thought of the happiness he might be enjoying with her by his side if he had not thrown the opportunity away when it was in his power to retain it, all combined to make him suffer keenly. He was sitting at his desk, his arms stretched

out on it, and his head resting on them. He represented a perfect picture of despair, as he sat there all alone in that great house with not even a servant around him, a prey to his bitter thoughts, a heart-broken man.

Minna had asked Tim not to mention her name to his master, but merely to announce a lady wished to see him. She somehow had a fear that Selby would refuse to see her; but she had perfect confidence in being able to convince him of her innocence when she had the opportunity of speaking to him, and she knew that Selby would not only listen to her but that he would believe her.

Tim therefore left his mistress and Nell in the drawing-room, while he went to the library, where he knew his master was, and knocking at the door he entered without waiting for a reply.

Selby hastily looked up at Tim and asked what he wanted.

"A lady wishes to speak to you, sir."

"A lady!" exclaimed Selby, "this is a strange hour for a lady to wish to speak to me. Did she give her name?"

Minna had followed Tim; she was so eager to meet her husband she could not wait. The excitement seemed to give her strength. She had told Nell to remain in the drawing-room, and had quietly slipped out and followed Tim without his being aware of it.

As Selby asked the question. Did she give her name? she was standing at the door, but she uttered not a word.

If an apparition had appeared to Selby, if Minna had risen from the grave and stood before him, he could not have been more startled as he recognized the well-

known features of his wife, though they appeared so white, so thin, so dreadfully changed that it seemed indeed as if she had come from the spirit-land.

A paper which Selby held in his hand dropped from his grasp, as he looked in a stunned and bewildered way at the figure standing at the door.

"Minna!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, George, it is me," was the reply. "May I sit down? I am very weak, and I want to speak to you."

Tim, who was about as much startled as his master when he found that his mistress had followed him, at once placed a chair for her and then quietly went out, closing the door behind him.

"Where did you come from?" asked Selby when they were alone. "Where have you been, Minna? why did you leave me—why have you wrecked our happiness? Was my conduct sufficient excuse for you to sacrifice your own good name?"

"Stop, George, listen to me first before you condemn me. You ask where I have been. I have been in New York these many weary days, waiting for you to come back. Did you not receive my letter?"

"I received no letter from you," said Selby. "You have been as dead to me. Why did you go away as you did? God knows I was not a good husband; but you need not have punished me so cruelly."

"I never left you, George. I never deserted my home. The day I went away from the 'Oaks' I thought I was going to see you. I received a letter from you, saying you were sick."

"A letter from me, saying that I was sick!" exclaimed Selby. "I never wrote that letter. I was not sick."

"So I found out afterwards," replied Minna, "to my bitter cost. I was decoyed away, George."

"Why did you write me, then, saying you had left me never to return?"

"I never wrote such a letter, George; it was a base forgery. It must have been written by the same person who wrote me and signed your name."

"Stay!" said Selby, "I have preserved that letter. I was looking at it only this evening," and as he spoke, he opened a drawer of the desk and took from it Minna's letter.

"There," he said, handing it to her, "do you mean to say that is not your handwriting?"

Minna took the paper, and as she looked at it, she recognized her own writing. She had indeed written the letter she held in her hand.

For a moment she was stunned; she could not speak, she looked at Selby in a dazed sort of a way. At last she said:

"Yes, George, I wrote that letter—not the post-script; but listen to me, let me explain all to you. I wrote this (holding out the paper) but I never sent it to you." She then told Selby how Mrs. Rolph had induced her to write the letter, but that she had immediately afterwards been ashamed of what she had written; that Mrs. Rolph, instead of destroying it, had evidently kept it to use it against her. She then recounted how she had left home, how she had been decoyed to Chicago, and insulted by Holt; how she had defended her honor against the villain, and the long and dangerous illness she had experienced. She told of her life in New York since that time, and how she had waited and wearied for his coming.

Selby never spoke during the touching recital of her wrongs; but when she had finished he rose, and, taking Minna's face between his hands, he bent down and kissed her.

"My poor wife! my poor darling! how you have suffered," he said.

Minna looked up in his face with love and tenderness beaming in her eyes.

"You do not doubt me, George? You do not believe I did wrong, do you, my husband?"

"No, Minna, I blamed myself for having, as I supposed, driven you away from home. I searched for you to bring you back, but I could not find any trace of you. I waited for you to return, but when you came not, I went away—I could not bear the sight of the 'Oaks' when it reminded me of my great loss."

"What a dreadful woman Mrs. Rolph must be; but I never harmed her. I cannot think why she treated me so cruelly," said Minna.

Selby colored slightly as he replied: "It was me she wished to harm—it is a long story. I will tell you sometime about it—not now. Surely she will be punished for what she has done, as Holt has been already."

"Yes," said Minna, "he met with a terrible punishment."

Minna now thought of Nell sitting alone in the drawing-room; but she could not for the moment bear to disturb the feeling of happiness she experienced in the society of her husband. At last, however, she said to Selby, "Will you come and see the dear girl to whom I owe my life? I want you to be a friend to her, George, always."

"I will always be her friend," replied Selby. "I will

never forget that I am indebted to her for the preservation of my greatest treasure."

One long fond embrace, and the husband and wife, so cruelly separated, but now so firmly united, passed out together to seek the girl who had been the means of bringing them so much happiness, but who was even then despairing of ever being able to enjoy what she had been the instrument of bestowing on others—a happy and contented mind.

Nell, as she sat in the great drawing-room alone with her thoughts, was contemplating the probable future before her. If it had not been for the opinion of the world, and its condemnation of her past life, how happy she could have felt at the prospect of passing the rest of her days with Minna, surrounded by every comfort and luxury. But she knew that it could not be, that she would be obliged to go out once more to face the cold censure of public opinion—to fight the hard battle against the scorn of her fellow beings. Then she wondered if Minna would obtain a reconciliation with her husband, or whether she would return to the humble abode where she (Nell) had passed such a happy pleasant time. For Minna's sake, she hoped that the husband and wife would be united again ; she could not hope that Minna would return with her to their humble home, because she knew that she could only do so as a rejected wife, which would result in sending her to an early grave. No, under any circumstances, she could not hope to retain Minna as a companion, and she fervently hoped that the interview then going on in the library would terminate in the reconciliation of husband and wife. She was beginning to think over her plans for the future, when Minna entered the room with Selby, and said :

"Nell, this is my husband, and George, this is the dear girl who has been my protectress and my nurse, who has been more than a friend to me in my troubles—who saved my life."

"Mrs. Selby has told me how much I am indebted to you," was Selby's reply. "I hope you will allow me to share the friendship she entertains for you. I never can repay you for all you have done for my dear wife. I hope the happiness you have been the means of giving us this day, will be repaid you by the good God—I know it will.—I would like you to always rely on me as one who will only consider it an honor and a pleasure to be your friend."

Selby said these words with an easy grace of manner, and a look of such earnest sincerity and supreme happiness that Nell was quite overcome. She held out her hand to be clasped by the grateful man, who looked at her with such a kindly expression, and she thought that seldom in the course of her life had she felt so happy as she did at that moment.

Tim now appeared at the door, and to him Minna turned as she said, "And here, George, is another friend I do not know what Nell and I would have done, if it had not been for him. Do you, Nell?"

"No, indeed, ma'am; we would have been helpless, truly, if it hadn't been for Tim."

"I was only doing what I'm paid for, sir," interrupted Tim, "looking after my mistress."

"Ay, Tim, and you did it well," said Selby. "God bless you! my lad."

Tim rubbed his eyes with his coat sleeve, and then, to change the subject he remarked:

"Hadn't I better see about the servants, sir? I can't

do cooking, washing, and house-work, now that you've got company."

Selby laughed as he said, "Yes, Tim, you had better attend to that the first thing in the morning. I suppose we'll manage a breakfast."

"Oh!" said Nell, "I'll stay and do that much for you."

"I hope you'll never leave us," said Selby.

"We'll talk of that another time. Mrs. Selby knows my feelings on that subject," said Nell.

It was then arranged that Tim should procure the necessary servants, and see to giving up the rooms that Minna and Nell had occupied; the latter having agreed to make the "Oaks" her home for a short time at least, and the old house that night contained four happy, contented hearts.

CHAPTER XXXV.

GEORGE SELBY and Minna had gone through a great trial, but, in the end, it proved to be a blessing. His gambling propensities and dissipated habits were thoroughly cured, and no happier couple could be found anywhere than they were to the end of their lives. He now prosecuted his literary labors in earnest, and Minna, when she was presented by him with his first novel, which met with universal favor as a work of high merit, was the proudest little woman in New York; and so pleased was he with the result of his first effort, that he continued to work hard until he had the satisfaction of knowing that he ranked as one of the best writers in the country of his birth. The "Oaks" became the home of happiness and contentment, and ere many years there were a group of merry children to be seen romping about the grounds, whose greatest pleasure was to get Tim Huckleberry to sit down in their midst under the shadow of the stately trees that grew in the grove, and spin yarns to them about the horses and dogs and the wonderful things he had seen during his life. But Tim never mentioned to anybody that his mistress had ever been obliged to take in sewing for a living, nor could he be induced to ever speak about the dark days in the life of his master and mistress. When Minna once referred to it he had said to her:

"Please, Mrs. Selby, let me forget that time. I would sooner not speak of it, not even to you."

And so Tim's view of the matter was respected. The past was never openly discussed, although George Selby and Minna frequently spoke of it in private, but always with thankfulness that the Almighty had been pleased to bless them as he had done, even though the ordeal had been a dreadful one through which they had passed.

The Countess de la Croix was kept a prisoner by the bedside of her husband for nearly five long years, and during that time who can tell the thoughts that passed through her mind. How often did she think of poisoning the sick old man who kept her rigidly to his side! She knew well that if she rebelled against his tyranny that he would indeed leave her in poverty, and she could not bear the thought of that. She who had been raised in luxury, to be compelled to battle with the world for a living, she never could do it; she would die first. Then the thought of putting an end to the old man would present itself; she had him completely in her power; she could administer the poison; he was liable to go off suddenly at any moment from natural causes; who would ever suspect that he had been poisoned? but then, the knowledge that his will remained unaltered deterred her. If she could only get him to cancel the clause which would impoverish her after his death, then she would not hesitate to murder him, for it was worse almost than death to her, this constant watching by his bedside. Nearly five years, however, rolled on ere the will was altered to suit the Countess, and during that time her beauty had faded considerably. Her duties as a nurse had made sad havoc with her appearance, and her health to a certain extent was broken down. But she consoled

herself with the idea that she would be a rich countess, and as such she would receive homage and attention; no matter whether her beauty was not as brilliant as it once was. When altering his will to suit the Countess, the Comte de la Croix knew that he had not many days to live. He also knew that his wife had remained by his bedside all those years from no love for him, but to secure for herself his wealth. He also knew that he would have been left alone at the mercy of strangers and servants, if it had not been that he held a power over his wife which she dare not disregard. Was it then with a feeling of almost sardonic pleasure that he acted the farce of willing his property to his wife, when he knew that on his death his whole property would be required to satisfy the demands of his creditors, and that his widow would find herself homeless and penniless instead of rich, as she expected to be?

The countess was not aware that her husband was so deeply involved; but, when he died, she discovered to her horror that there were claims against his property that had to be satisfied which would leave her without a penny. It was a dreadful blow to this proud woman to find herself a beggar, with only an empty title, which, without the means to sustain it, was but a mockery to the hopes and aspirations she had indulged in. It was too much for her to bear, and one morning the servants, on opening the door of her chamber, found her stretched lifeless on the bed. She had committed suicide to escape the wretched life she saw was in store for her. Thus was this woman punished for the misery she had caused to others. Forgotten by her friends, and unmourned, she was buried amongst strangers.

Minna never heard the particulars of her father's

death, although she learned that he had died in Australia. Selby had seen an account of the murder, taken from a Melbourne paper, but he had withheld the information from his wife as he did not wish to shock her.

Nell remained a short time at the "Oakes" after the reunion of Selby and Minna, but she could not be induced to make it her home. She remained firm in her determination to carry out her scheme for reclaiming her fallen sisters, and, in George Selby and Minna, she found two earnest supporters. Through the influence of the former she succeeded in obtaining a place as nurse in one of the hospitals; and there the warm-hearted girl became so useful,—her great strength enabling her to endure great fatigue—and she was so tender withal, so kind and gentle, that the patients loved to have her attending on them. But Nell felt that she had a higher duty to perform; she could not forget the poor women who were going to destruction in the old life, and so she resolved to organize a society of her own creation from amongst those girls who desired to leave their career of shame and lead better lives. She named it the "Band of Mercy," and through the exertions of Selby and Minna a number of ladies and gentlemen were induced to furnish the means to commence the good work. Nell's idea was to obtain a few girls to start with, and this she managed to accomplish by going herself amongst them, and talking to them about her plans. There were five poor girls who joined her at first, and so anxious were they to atone for the past, that they were ready to follow Nell into any danger where they might be useful in alleviating the sufferings of their fellow-beings. The outbreak of yellow fever in the South afforded them the opportunity, and there Nell and her small band went on their errand of mercy, and

so well did they perform their work, so nobly did they carry out the mission which they voluntarily undertook, that they earned the gratitude of a suffering people, and, at the same time, obtained some consolation for their own sad hearts. God, in his mercy, spared these six women from being stricken down by the fever; and then Nell, feeling that she had discovered a way of escape for her poor fallen fellow-creatures, continued her good work. She inaugurated a system by which her Band of Mercy performed their duties wherever their services were required. In the hospitals, in times of epidemics, in cases of accidents, in private families, wherever the attendance of a faithful nurse was wanted, there Nell would send one of her band. Who was there to be found to insult or scoff at these poor repentant women, when they were seeking to atone for their fault in such a noble manner?—none; rather did they earn the respect and admiration of the world. They had secured, so far as this life was concerned, a powerful protector in the shape of public opinion. So far as their souls were concerned, we are told that charity covereth a multitude of sins. Surely the prayers of these Magdalens, like the petition of the publican of old, had, beyond peradventure, reached Him who is the infinitely pitying, loving one, and He had pardoned, at least that was Nell's hope.

THE END.

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